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**Décadence, Dekadenz, Dekadens:  
An Interdiscursive Exploration of Decadence in  
German and Scandinavian Literature and Culture at  
the Fin de Siècle**

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**PhD in Comparative Literature**

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## **Declaration**

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself, and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any other degree or professional qualification. Except where explicitly stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

Signature:

Laura Alice Chapot

Date: 6<sup>th</sup> June 2019

## Abstract

In this thesis I develop an innovative theoretical and methodological approach for exploring interconnections between language, literature and culture at the fin de siècle in Germany and Sweden, focussing on the concept of decadence as the mainspring guiding the elaboration of my approach and analyses.

The fin de siècle is characterised as a moment of acute and significant upheaval, instability and uncertainty. Foundational aspects of social and subjective self-experience and self-understanding undergo profound transformation at this time as core cultural institutions, conventions and values become destabilised and opened up to reformulation. In particular, a sense of hopeful optimism and faith in the potentialities of humanity and human ingenuity jars with a concurrent horror at the ruthlessness, hardship and unrest through which these possibilities are unfolded, and with a sense of anxiety surrounding the uncertainties of a self-conscious and open future. How to conceptualise, theorise and analytically manage and approach these ambivalences and tensions is at the heart of the drive underpinning this research.

Decadence, especially in the German and Swedish cultural contexts, emerges as a particularly problematic and revealing concept to explore the ambivalences and contradictions of the fin de siècle as troubled and troubling time. Decadence is a notably widespread concept at the fin de siècle, yet this diffuseness poses theoretical and analytical dilemmas. There is a conflicted irresolution between recognising the prevalence of the concept at the time as significant and meaningful, and yet the profound ambiguity and liminality of the term frustrates its use as critical concept in analyses. Decadence is dismissed as too unstable and questionable, and the fundamental indeterminacy of the term often becomes separated out and collapsed in order to make it analytically manageable. It is at this analytical juncture that this project is situated — how to reconcile the notable saliency and significance of decadence with its profound ambiguity and instability. The main drive underpinning this project is therefore to develop an original theoretical and methodological approach that explicitly, flexibly and productively addresses the fundamental ambiguity and liminality of decadence at the fin de siècle, an approach in which the instability and ambiguity of the concept become the springboards for analysis rather than its limitation.

In the first half of this thesis, I translate critical issues and insights on decadent ambiguity and instability at the fin de siècle into theories of (re)signification and meaning. Reframing decadence in terms of theories of meaning and (re)signification enables me to theorise the significance and meaningfulness of the ambiguity and liminality of decadence as playing a particular semantic function — as opening up semantic resources and strategies for destabilising, exploring and reformulating different possibilities of meaningful configuration. In particular, a theoretical and methodological approach to meaning and signification that combines systems theory, discourse theory and computational approaches to textual analysis facilitates a systemic, flexible and productive approach to decadent ambiguity and liminality at the

fin de siècle in which discursive patterns and tensions can be explored across different scales and lines of analysis. Systems theories formalise the shifting interactions and interrelations of complex phenomena. These theories can therefore productively address the structural tensions of decadence and the way in which it interrelates different culture spheres and levels. The discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe is especially useful for theorising moments of acute cultural instability as moments of particularly visible and intense processes of (re)signification. As a constructionist theory, discourse theory offers theoretical resources for reconceptualising the relations between different cultural practices through meaning and signification. A discourse perspective theorises meaning as cultural practice in which a shared cultural reality is elaborated through patterns of cumulation and interrelation that draw on shifting repositories of potential cultural resources and that are perpetually destabilised and restabilised into different arrangements and configurations. Computational deformances, enabled by word frequency queries and topic modelling, can visualise and re-present these latent patterns of cumulation and interrelation within and across texts in ways that would not be representable and perceptible otherwise. Furthermore, the malleability of computational methods can allow for the tracing and comparing of different lines of inquiry at different scales of analysis thereby facilitating an exploratory, speculative and defamiliarising analytical process through the iterative movement between local and systemic scales of analysis and different lines of inquiry.

In the second half of this thesis, this approach is unfolded into analyses of texts written between the 1870s and the 1910s by Thomas Mann, Friedrich Nietzsche, Hjalmar Söderberg and August Strindberg. These are then contrasted to investigations of patterns of discursive clusters and tensions within and across corpora of research literature on decadence and associated concepts published between the 1920s and the 2010s. These analyses explore and substantiate how conceptualising decadence as opening up discursive strategies and resources that play out dynamics and possibilities of (re)signification can bring to light productive avenues of further investigation.

## Acknowledgements

“as Milton’s German Pietist contemporaries said, *Denken ist Danken*, ‘to think it to thank’ (Steiner 1978: 21)”<sup>1</sup>

This epigraph above is an example of frowned-upon scholarly practice: a citation, within a citation. However, it perfectly illustrates what I wish to express here. This work may indeed be the fruit of my own labours; however, this masks all the different people involved in helping produce this piece. As you read through this thesis, the thinkers, writers, texts and other resources to which I am indebted in the production of this project will become explicitly apparent. These acknowledgements, however, are the place to express gratitude towards those who do not feature explicitly, but who nevertheless have played a part in helping towards the completion of this thesis.

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<sup>1</sup> Willard McCarty, *Humanities Computing* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. ix.

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Of course. It's all been said better before. If I thought I had to say it better than anyone else, I'd never start. Better or worse is immaterial. The thing is that it has to be said; by me; ontologically. We each have to say it, to say it in our own way. Not of our own *will*, but as it comes through us. Good or bad, great or little: that isn't what human creation is about. It is that we have to try; to put it down in pigment, or words, or musical notations, or we die.<sup>1</sup>

Madeleine L'Engle. *A Circle of Quiet*. Section 1.9.

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<sup>1</sup> Madeleine L'Engle, *A Circle of Quiet* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972), p. 28.



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# Introduction

## 1 - Outline of the Project: Driving Questions and Aims

The research undertaken in this project offers an innovative approach to studies of literature and culture at the fin de siècle. The difficulties of conceptualising and analytically managing the plethora of cultural formations and configurations in Europe at the fin de siècle has been a source of much deliberation. Decadence appears as a particularly problematic concept within these debates. It is characterised as a notably ambiguous and liminal concept — it is strikingly diffuse and widespread at the time, it appears to be both highly tied to artistic and literary domains, and yet it is also understood as a prevalent concept in broad cultural and social debates of the time, it straddles different cultural domains and tensions, and is characterised as a particularly liminal concept which appears less as thing in itself and more as facilitating transition and change between other things. The instability of the term has fuelled debate over how useful it can be as critical and analytical resource, and yet it is recurrent in analyses of art and culture of the fin de siècle. The aim of this project is to engage with the concept of decadence in a theoretically and methodologically innovative way in order to offer an original approach to decadence at the turn of the century. In this project, I argue that the fundamental ambiguity and liminality recurrently identified in relation to decadence at the fin de siècle is precisely what makes it a meaningful and

significant concept at the time. Consequently, the way in which this constitutive ambiguity and liminality is addressed, theorised and methodologically explored emerges as a decisive premise of analyses of decadence. The main drive of this project is therefore to develop an original theoretical and methodological approach that explicitly, flexibly and productively addresses the fundamental ambiguity and liminality of decadence at the fin de siècle, an approach in which the instability and ambiguity of the concept become the springboards for analysis rather than its limitations.

The European fin de siècle is characterised as a moment of crisis and significant upheaval in societies across Europe.<sup>1</sup> It is a time of profound transformative change in which foundational social and cultural institutions, conventions and values become destabilised.<sup>2</sup> Core aspects of metaphysical, social and cultural organisation, (self-)experience and (self-)understanding become subject to reformulation and reconceptualisation.<sup>3</sup> The fin de siècle is therefore a moment of great instability as well as experimentation and exploration: “For every movement, there was a countermovement; for every orientation, alternatives sprang up.”<sup>4</sup> The fin de siècle emerges as a particularly troubling time of profound instability, uncertainty and ambivalence — it is a time in which a sense of hopeful expectation, a sense of possibility is intertwined with a sense of disillusionment, despair and anxiety. There is

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<sup>1</sup> cf. e.g. Roger Bauer, ‘«Fin de Siècle» et «décadence» Comme Catégories Littéraires: Positions et Propositions’, *Neohelicon*, 3.3–4 (1975), 69–86 (p. 70); Florian Krobb, “‘Die Kunst Der Väter Tödtet Das Leben Der Enkel’: Decadence and Crisis in Fin de Siècle German and Austrian Discourse’, *New Literary History*, Forms and/of Decadence, 35.4 (2004), 547–62 (p. 550).

<sup>2</sup> Horst Thomé, ‘Modernität Und Bewußtseinswandel in Der Zeit Des Naturalismus Und Des Fin de Siècles’, in *Hansers Sozialgeschichte Der Deutschen Literatur. Bd. 7 Naturalismus, Fin de Siècle, Expressionismus. 1890-1918.*, ed. by York-Gotthart Mix (München, Wien: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2000), pp. 15–27 (pp. 22–25); Irene Scobbie and Birgitta Thompson, ‘Åttitalister (Writers of the 1880s)’, in *Aspects of Modern Swedish Literature*, ed. by Irene Scobbie, 2nd edn (Norwich, UK: Norvik Press, 1999), pp. 9–30 (p. 10).

<sup>3</sup> Thomé, pp. 25–26.

<sup>4</sup> Krobb, p. 550.

“an expansion of the consciousness of human possibilities and the attempts to live them,”<sup>5</sup> a new sense of faith in the potentialities of humanity and human ingenuity, and yet this sense of possibility is destabilised by the ruthlessness through which it is realised, the imbrication of progress and possibility with unrest, hardship, deprivation and austerity.<sup>6</sup> Some critics have configured this ambivalence as a contradiction between the way things are talked about, the way things are experienced — as unsettling, uprooted and troubling, — and the way things actually are — as improving, progressing, prospering.<sup>7</sup> How to conceptualise, theorise and analytically manage and approach these ambivalences and tensions is at the heart of the drive underpinning this project.

The notion of decadence at the fin de siècle is recurrently linked to the sense of pessimism and disillusionment at this time, and is sometimes configured specifically as a reaction to the sense of optimism and positivism.<sup>8</sup> The German and Swedish cultural contexts at this time, however, are usually characterised in terms of renewed optimism and faith. Callmänder, for example, points to the “national optimistic faith in the future” prevalent in Sweden at the time,<sup>9</sup> whilst Schoolfield argues that “[s]peaking very generally, we can point to the strong current of optimism and even of arrogance that

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<sup>5</sup> J.W. Burrow, *The Crisis of Reason: European Thought, 1848-1914* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 132.

<sup>6</sup> Scobbie and Thompson, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> Krobb, p. 550; Thomé, p. 24; Eugen Weber, *France. Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 13–14, 18.

<sup>8</sup> cf. e.g. Per Thomas Andersen, *Dekadanse i Nordisk Litteratur 1880-1900* (Oslo: Aschehough, 1992), pp. 131–32; Tom Geddes, ‘Swedish Fin-de-Siècle: Hjalmar Söderberg (1869-1941)’, in *Aspects of Modern Swedish Literature*, ed. by Irene Scobbie, 2nd edn (Norwich, UK: Norvik Press, 1999), pp. 108–36 (pp. 112–13); *Dekadenz in Deutschland. Beiträge Zur Erforschung Der Romanliteratur Um Die Jahrhundertwende*, ed. by Dieter Kafitz (Frankfurt am Main, Bern, New York: Peter Lang, 1987), p. 7; Krobb, pp. 548, 556.

<sup>9</sup> Vila Callmänder, ‘Nittitalister (Writers of the 1890s)’, in *Aspects of Modern Swedish Literature*, ed. by Irene Scobbie, 2nd edn (Norwich, UK: Norvik Press, 1999), pp. 74–107 (p. 76).

ran through German public life in the latter part of the nineteenth century.”<sup>10</sup> Analysing decadence within these contexts therefore appears as a particularly relevant angle to explore the contradictions and ambivalence of the fin de siècle. In addition, the German and Swedish cultural contexts are particularly linked by a number of interchanges between these cultures, especially in relation to the artistic and literary spheres.<sup>11</sup> In relation to decadence more specifically, the article by the Norwegian Hjalmar Christensen on “Décadence” (1894) is often pinpointed as significant for the introduction of decadence in German public discourse.<sup>12</sup> In the Scandinavian context, the authors Ola Hansson and Stella Kleves (a nom de plume, her given name is Mathilde Kruse) have been identified as introducing decadence to Sweden through articles in the feminist newspaper *Framåt* between the years 1886-1889. Significantly, Ola Hansson lived in Germany from 1889 and Stella Kleves in Copenhagen.<sup>13</sup>

Decadence is often framed as a particularity and incompatibility in relation to these contexts, especially when linked to the ostensibly pervading optimism at the time. Schoolfield, for example, argues that “[a] decadent frame of mind seemed incompatible with the flourishing Germany of those years,”<sup>14</sup> and that “the literary fad of decadence thrived [...] ill in Germany.”<sup>15</sup> Callmander argues that decadence in Sweden is at odds

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<sup>10</sup> George C. Schoolfield, *A Baedeker of Decadence: Charting a Literary Fashion, 1884-1927* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 268.

<sup>11</sup> Alan Marshall, ‘Naturalism and Nationalism’, *German Life and Letters*, 37.2 (1984), 91–104 (p. 97); Sabine Strümper-Krobb, “‘Fern Im Dänischen Norden Ein Bruder’: Thomas Mann Und Hermann Bang. Ein Literarische Spurensuche by Claudia Gremler”, *The Modern Language Review*, 100.1 (2005), 261–62 (p. 261).

<sup>12</sup> Bengt Algo Sørensen, ‘Décadence in Deutschland. Studien Zu Einem Versunkenen Diskurs Der 90er Jahre Des 19. Jahrhunderts’, *Orbis Litterarum*, 61.5 (2006), 426–28 (p. 427).

<sup>13</sup> Ebba Witt-Brattström, *Dekadensens Kön. Ola Hansson och Laura Marholm*. (Stockholm: Norstedts, 2007), p. 35.

<sup>14</sup> Schoolfield, p. 268.

<sup>15</sup> Schoolfield, p. 267.

with the general literary culture of the time,<sup>16</sup> whilst Geddes emphasises that decadence was only one particular aspect of Swedish literary production which was in tension with the more characteristic neo-romantic literature prevalent at the time.<sup>17</sup> The emphasis on optimism in relation to German and Swedish fin de siècle cultural contexts, and the configuring of decadence as a particularity at odds with the general culture of the time, suggests that these are particularly relevant areas for exploring the contradictions and ambivalences of the fin de siècle context more generally.

Despite these claims of incongruity, it is recurrently argued that decadence is a remarkably widespread word at the fin de siècle, even in the German and Swedish contexts,<sup>18</sup> and is recurrently understood as in some way linked to and mediating the sense of crisis and ambivalence of the fin de siècle.<sup>19</sup> However, despite the striking saliency of the word at the time, and the recognition that it is in some ways particularly linked to these troubling times, scholars often emphasise the emptiness and diffuseness of the concept, and question its significance, usefulness and validity in analyses of the fin de siècle.<sup>20</sup> Decadence is understood as particularly unstable, vague and ambiguous, and therefore cannot be a useful critical and analytical resource. In literary analyses in particular, decadence is recognised as profoundly linked to literary

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<sup>16</sup> Callmänder, pp. 76–77.

<sup>17</sup> Tom Geddes, *Hj. Söderberg: Doktor Glas*, Studies in Swedish Literature, 3, 2nd edn (Hull: Orton and Holmes, 1980), p. 31.

<sup>18</sup> Krobb, pp. 547–48; Bauer, p. 69; Kafitz, *Dekadenz*, p. 20; Dieter Kafitz, *Décadence in Deutschland. Studien Zu Einem Versunkenen Diskurs Der 90er Jahre Des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Heidelberg: Heidelberg Universitätsverlag, 2004), p. 149; Matthew Potolsky, 'Introduction', *New Literary History*, Forms and/of Decadence, 35.4 (2004), v–xi (p. vi).

<sup>19</sup> Per Thomas Andersen, pp. 48–81, 131–32, 551; Krobb, pp. 548–49, 556, 559–60; Bauer, p. 70; Potolsky, 'Introduction', p. vi.

<sup>20</sup> Bauer, p. 69; Richard Gilman, *Decadence. The Strange Life of an Epithet* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979), p. 35; Krobb, p. 548; Jean de Palacio, *La Décadence: Le Mot et La Chose*. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2011), p. 23; Thomas Reed Whissen, *The Devil's Advocates. Decadence in Modern Literature* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), p. xi.



and artistic domains,<sup>21</sup> and yet is also configured as a highly unstable and questionable term for literary analysis.<sup>22</sup> It is at these analytical crossroads that this project is situated — how to reconcile the notable saliency and significance of decadence with its profound ambiguity and instability, and how to conceptualise and analytically explore the profound ambivalences of the fin de siècle more generally. The purpose of this project, therefore, is to develop an innovative approach for analysing and exploring the interconnections between language, literature and culture in Germany and Sweden at these troubling times, and to use the concept of decadence as the cornerstone on which to focus the project. Decadence is characterised as a particularly problematic and revealing concept to explore the ambivalences and discrepancies of the fin de siècle cultural context, and these appear as especially acute in relation to the German and Swedish cultural contexts in particular.

In Chapter I, I identify and explore a recurrent issue in research on decadence at the fin de siècle, namely, the fundamental ambiguity and liminality of the concept. I discuss the ways in which decadence has been understood to be fundamentally liminal and ambiguous — particularly, how it is a notably widespread and diffuse concept at the fin de siècle (in the first part of the chapter, I-1), how it encompasses fundamental tensions and interrelates and straddles different cultural and analytical domains and scales (I-2), and how it is understood as a fundamentally liminal and slippery concept that plays out dynamics of transition and change (I-3). As I discuss these different facets of the ambiguity and instability of decadence, I also explore the ways in which

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<sup>21</sup> cf. e.g. Per Thomas Andersen, pp. 49–81, 130–31, 551; Bauer, p. 70; Gilman, p. 35; Kafitz, *Dekadenz.*, p. 7; Krobb, pp. 548–49, 556, 559–60; Potolsky, 'Introduction', p. vi.

<sup>22</sup> cf. e.g. Charles Bernheimer, *Decadent Subjects: The Idea of Decadence in Art, Literature, Philosophy, and Culture of the Fin de Siècle in Europe*, ed. by T. Jefferson Kline and Naomi Schor (Baltimore, Md. and London: John Hopkins University Press, 2002), p. 27; Gilman, pp. 103–4; Potolsky, 'Introduction', p. v; Whissen, p. xi.

critics have theorised and analytically addressed and engaged with these aspects of decadent ambiguity and liminality. This recurrent issue of the concept's vagueness and instability, meaning and significance, highlights the primacy of the theoretical and methodological approach in research on decadence. The way in which the core ambiguity and liminality of decadence is addressed will fundamentally shape the subsequent approach and analyses. I therefore argue that there is a need for theoretical and methodological approaches to decadence that explicitly, flexibly and productively engage with the fundamental ambiguity and liminality of the concept. I therefore align with and highlight approaches to decadence that recognise how these aspects of the ambiguity and liminality of decadence are constitutive of the concept's meaning and significance at the fin de siècle, how these aspects fuel the semantic force and meaningfulness of decadence at the fin de siècle (I-4).

In Chapter II, I combine and rework the critical insights discussed in Chapter I into an original theoretical and methodological framework that productively addresses the ambiguity and liminality of decadence. Issues of liminality can be productively engaged with in the conceptualisation of decadence as a dynamics, as playing out processes of change and transition. However, the ambiguity of decadence rests on issues of meaning and significance in the way that the concept is particularly polysemous and unstable, and how it straddles and brings together different tensions and cultural and social domains. This therefore suggests how decadence can be productively reframed in terms of dynamics of (re)signification and elaboration of meaning. The significance and meaningfulness of the ambiguity and liminality of decadence can be understood in the way in which it plays out processes of (re)signification and elaboration of meaning. In this first part of Chapter II (II-1), I discuss how systems theories can address issues of how decadence interrelates

different domains and tensions. The epistemological abstraction enabled through systemic approaches helps to formalise in analytically flexible and manageable ways the complex interrelations and interplay of dynamic, shifting and emergent phenomena. In particular, Luhmann's systems theory of the process of (re)signification theorises the dynamics of (re)signification as unfolding through *re-entry*, through processes of self-differentiation and self-reference. Obscured and excluded semantic tensions are made visible and refolded into meaning in the processes of (re)signification through re-entry. This can reframe the structural tensions of decadence as dynamics of (re)signification through processes of self-reference and self-differentiation, repetition and variation. Constructionist and discursive theories, discussed in the second part of the chapter (II-2), substantiate these theoretical insights further as systemic theories that specifically focus on the theorisation of the dynamics of meaning as cultural practice. Similarly to Luhmann, the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe also conceptualises the process of (re)signification as systemic dynamics of self-differentiation and self-reference. In times of crisis, stabilised meaning becomes destabilised by making visible the excluded meanings and the array of potential possibilities of meaning (i.e. the *field of discursivity*, the field of possible resources for elaborating different configurations of meaning). (Re)signification is therefore a perennial process of *articulation* in which meaning is destabilised and restabilised into different discursive configurations by making visible and reworking resources from the field of discursivity, the space of potential possibilities of meaning. Discursive configurations are contingent arrangements of selected elements from the field of discursivity that can span across different domains and different scales. Discourse theory therefore adds an additional dimension to the theorisation of the process of (re)signification beyond Luhmann's systems theory. Meaning conceived as discursive

process of articulation is conceptualised in terms of self-reference and self-differentiation, liberation and constraint (opening up the field of discursivity and stabilising meanings into contingent patterns of configuration), *and* in terms of cumulation and interrelation. A discursive theorisation of meaning entails conceiving of meaning as cultural practice in which meaning is a shared cultural reality elaborated through patterns of cumulation that draw on repositories of potential cultural resources (field of discursivity) and that are perpetually destabilised and restabilised into different arrangements and configurations. In the third part of Chapter II (II-3), I discuss how computational approaches to textual analysis can methodologically perform the theoretical premises of systems and discourse theories of meaning as processes of self-reference and self-differentiation and of cumulation and interrelation. The deformances of texts that can be performed with computational methods allow to visualise and re-present patterns of statistical cumulation and interrelation within and across texts. Working with computational methods also allows to fragment and re-present texts along different analytical lines of inquiry. This helps to perform and substantiate the systemic formalisation of the interrelations and intersections of different discursive and analytical domains and of different scales of analysis — intersections between different spheres and domains can be flexibly mapped out and traced through methods of statistical cumulation and interrelations, and the malleability of computational methods can flexibly follow through and trace lines of inquiry at different scales of analysis. Computational approaches are therefore a systemic methodology that can facilitate the movement between different scales of analysis and lines of inquiry. Computational approaches are also a discursive methodology that allow to visualise and explore patterns of statistical cumulation and interrelation that would not be representable and perceptible otherwise.

The different aspects of decadence ambiguity and liminality — the issues of diffuseness and suggestiveness, and the problems of how to analytically address the structural tensions of the concept and the ways in which it straddles different cultural and analytical domains and scales — can be productively reframed in the combination of systemic, discursive and computational approaches. Structural tensions and interrelations between domains are reframed as processes of self-differentiation and self-reference, destabilisation and restabilisation, in the process of (re)signification. The concept's diffuseness and suggestiveness are theoretically and methodologically harnessed as strategies and resources in the process of (re)signification that open up fields of possible meanings and allow for the shaping of different configurations of meaning which can be explored through patterns of cumulation and interrelation. Decadence can therefore be productively conceptualised as discursive strategy and resource that play out processes of articulation and re-entry. The significance and meaningfulness of the ambiguity and liminality of decadence can be analysed through the ways in which it exposes, stimulates and explores processes of (re)signification, of meaningful elaboration. In Chapters III and IV, I explore how this theoretical and methodological approach can be unfolded into analyses. Chapter III analyses corpora of texts by Thomas Mann, Friedrich Nietzsche, Hjalmar Söderberg and August Strindberg written between the 1870s and the 1920s. In the first part of the chapter (III-1), computational deformances of the texts (using word frequency queries and topic modelling) suggest patterns of cumulation and interrelation across the corpora namely, recurring tensions between semantics of individuality and collectivity, physicality and inwardness or subjectivity, and exteriors and interiors. This allows me to identify at different scales patterns of semantic clusters and tensions that indicate particular areas of exploration and reformulation. This opens up alternative perspectives for

conceptualising aspects of literature and culture of the fin de siècle, and highlights avenues for further analysis of the particular ways in which these tensions are played out and unfolded. In the second part of the chapter (III-2) these recurring tensions are unfolded further into closer-scale more in-depth analyses of *Der Fall Wagner* (1888) by Nietzsche, *Tristan* (1903), *Tonio Kröger* (1903) and *Der Tod in Venedig* (1912) by Mann, *Doktor Glas* (1905) by Söderberg, and *I havsbandet* (1890) by Strindberg. This allows me to reframe aspects of these literary texts associated with decadence in terms of particular processes of self-reference and self-differentiation, repetition and variation, cumulation and interrelation both in intra- and inter-textual perspectives. In Chapter IV, analyses of corpora of scholarly and research literature on decadence and related concepts published between the 1920s and the 2010s substantiate further how decadence can be understood as opening up discursive resources and strategies that play out processes of articulation and re-entry. The way decadence has been conceptualised and explored in the research literature further points to how it can be productively understood in terms of processes of (re)signification. Computational deformances of these research corpora (using word frequency queries and topic modelling) highlight frequent discursive tensions and interrelations that recur across the corpora at the intersections of broad discursive domains of modern self-experience and self-understanding. This is discussed in the second part of the chapter (IV-2 — the first part of the chapter, IV-1, is a reminder of important points on the corpus and the analytical process). Throughout the discussions in IV-2, these patterns of tensions and interrelations are contextualised in relation to relevant aspects of the fin de siècle social and cultural context, as well as in relation to the analyses developed in Chapter III. The third part of the Chapter IV (IV-3) compares discursive patterns as derived from the research corpora on decadence with discursive patterns generated from corpora of

research literature related to concepts of modernity, fin de siècle and degeneration. These comparisons bring to light significant patterns of self-reference and self-differentiation between the corpora related to decadence and those related to modernity, fin de siècle and degeneration which provides fresh ways of conceptualising the liminality of decadence and the relations between the concepts of decadence, modernity, fin de siècle and degeneration. The analyses in Chapter III and Chapter IV therefore unfold how conceptualising decadence as discursive strategies and resources that play out dynamics and possibilities of (re)signification through re-entry and articulation bring to light productive avenues of further investigation. These analyses therefore exemplify the productivity of considering decadence in terms of process of (re)signification and the analytical possibilities this approach can offer.

In this project, I therefore primarily aim to develop and demonstrate an innovative approach for exploring interconnections between language, literature and culture at the fin de siècle by focussing on the case of decadence in particular. In doing so, I also aim to contribute insights into the process of elaborating literary and cultural analyses when working with computational methods. In the remainder of this introduction I will therefore provide further details on the specific computational methods used in this project (namely, word frequency queries and topic modelling), I will present the corpora and discuss the rationale and process of elaboration of these corpora, and I will discuss in more detail the analytical process I unfolded when developing my analyses.

## 2 - Details on the Specific Computational Methods Used in this Project: Word Frequency Queries and Topic Modelling

### Word Frequency and Text Search queries with NVivo (11):

In order to generate my word frequency lists I use software called NVivo (11).<sup>23</sup> NVivo is classified as a kind of software called Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS).<sup>24</sup> These types of software combine an array of quantitative and qualitative tools that help manage, explore and find patterns in (usually large amounts of) material, and assist researchers in elaborating analyses supported by computational methods. NVivo allows users to run “queries” on any kind of permutation of your research material (text, image, sound). These queries allow the user to decompose and recompose the material along different analytical lines. These visualisations are not analyses in themselves, but allow to re-present the material in order to facilitate different kinds of perspectives.

The main tools in the NVivo tool-kit that I use in this project are “Word Frequency” queries and “Text Search” queries. Word frequency queries generate lists of the most recurrent words across the material selected for the query. Word frequency queries fragment sources into statistical patterns of most frequent words thereby providing a sense of the cumulative patterns and recurring terms across the corpora. Different parameters can be set for running word frequency queries namely, whether to run “exact” or “stemmed” word frequency queries. Exact word frequency queries will count every unique string of characters as a single instance and will therefore base the

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<sup>23</sup> *NVivo Qualitative Data Analysis Software*, version 11 (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2015).

<sup>24</sup> Ann Lewins and Christina Silver, *Using Software in Qualitative Research. A Step-by-Step Guide* (London, Thousand Oaks, CA., New Dehli: Sage, 2007), p. 6.



frequencies on the number of words that have the exact same string of characters (i.e. the words “modern” and “moderns” will count as separate instances and their frequencies will be counted separately). On the other hand, stemmed word frequency queries group together words that share the same stem (i.e. “modern” and “moderns” will be counted together as related words into a single frequency group). Stemmed word frequency queries therefore offer a further level of abstracted insight, further information on recurring statistical patterns of language. However, the computational grouping together of words that ostensibly share the same stem is not always particularly reliable or meaningful. For example, “decade” is included with words such as “decadence”, “decadent”, “decadents.” “Meaning” is grouped with “meanness.” I have therefore not relied too heavily on stemmed word frequency lists, but I still use them as an indication of higher-level patterns since, overall, they do still provide reliable indication of patterns, especially when taken in combination with exact word frequency lists.

Another important parameter to consider when running word frequency queries in NVivo is the “stop-word” list. Stop-word lists are a tool for filtering out words that are very recurrent in language, but that will not add any meaningful information to the analyses, and may rather impede the development of significant patterns (e.g. words such as “the” or “and”). NVivo has built-in “dictionaries” for particular languages. These dictionaries enable the grouping together of stem words, and they also generate pre-made stop-word lists for their particular language. There are dictionaries for English, German and French in NVivo, but not for Swedish. This means that I was not able to run stemmed word frequency queries for Swedish language corpora. Furthermore, I did manually generate a stop-word list for Swedish myself in order to filter out recurrent words that were not significant for the analyses, but this stop-word

list is not as stringent as the pre-made stop-word lists, and therefore the patterns of cumulation may not appear as clearly in the Swedish language corpora — i.e. words that appear to have a higher frequency in the other corpora (such as appearing as 4th most frequent) may in fact share a same level of frequency of a word in Swedish corpora that appears with a lower frequency such as 12th.

Text search queries are sometimes used to complement word frequency queries. Text search queries list every single occurrence of a word across the corpora. This therefore provides an easy way to tunnel back to the context of frequent words and to the particular utterances that constitute the cumulative patterns (as identified in word frequency lists). These tools are often used to assess whether a particularly frequent word is significant and relevant or not to the analyses. Furthermore, text search tools were particularly useful in the analyses of the 1870s-1910s corpora — bringing to light every single instance of particular words can make visible patterns that may otherwise be overlooked. The combination of word frequency and text search tools provides a way of identifying significant statistical patterns, and then exploring in more contextualised detail the initial patterns identified by word frequency queries.

### **Topic Modelling with Machine Learning for Language Toolkit (MALLET):**

MAchine Learning for Language Toolkit (MALLET) is an open source software developed by Andrew McCallum and colleagues at the University of Massachusetts Amherst (with contributions from colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania).<sup>25</sup> MALLET contains tools that can perform a variety of different operations for language processing (e.g. statistical natural language processing, document classification,

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<sup>25</sup> Andrew Kachites McCallum, *MALLET: A Machine Learning for Language Toolkit* (University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2002) <<http://mallet.cs.umass.edu>>.

clustering, information extraction), however the tool relevant to this project is topic modelling.

Topic modelling is a procedure for identifying how words and groups of words collocate in a single text or across a corpus of texts (although it is possible to use any of these tools on small numbers and even single text, these types of tools — topic modelling and word frequency queries — usually yield more significant insights when applied to larger corpora of texts). In topic modelling procedures, a model for how texts are elaborated and become meaningful is used to make visible statistical patterns of distribution of words across texts. In other words, topic modelling supposes that texts are made meaningful through the spread and combination of words, and these patterns of words suggest semantically related groups that recur throughout the texts. The spread and distribution of these semantically related groups across texts represent how texts are made meaningful. The meaning of the texts will be apparent through patterns of words within and across texts that can be grouped into different semantic clusters. Topic modelling reverse-engineers this process of meaningful elaboration. It analyses the distributions of words within and across texts and groups them into a list of different “topics” which represents the semantic clusters that were used to constitute the texts. Put more simply, topic modelling groups together words that frequently occur close to one another within and across texts. These groups of words that frequently associate with one another within and across texts are the “topics”. Topic modelling therefore groups into topics semantically related words deduced from statistical patterns of distribution of words across corpora. Topic modelling methods function on the premise that words that frequently occur close to one another will be semantically related in

some meaningful way, and that these patterns of semantic relations elaborate the meaning of the text.<sup>26</sup>

There are a number of parameters that can be set and modified in order to generate topic models, but the main ones I use in this thesis are number of iterations (how many times the model will check that a word belongs to a group or another, how many times the model checks which words goes into which topic and which topic should be assigned to which source) and number of topics. The number of iterations I use is 3000 iterations — this is more than sufficient in relation to my corpora for the topic modelling to arrive at a stabilised set of topics. The “number of topics” parameter tells the topic model how many semantic clusters were used to elaborate the meaning of the texts. In other words, you can set the number of topics for a group of text to five, and the topic model will break down the statistical patterns of co-occurrence of words into five different groups, five different bags of words. Each group is a topic of semantically related words — words that occur in relation to one another within and across the texts — within a list of five other topics. There are not fixed rules for how many topics can be present in and across texts since this is just a model, a theorisation, for exploring distributions of words across texts. In practice, the number of topics will produce more or less fine-grain patterns of words<sup>27</sup> — it is a question of

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<sup>26</sup> Clay Templeton, ‘Topic Modeling in the Humanities: An Overview’, *Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities*, 2011 <<https://mith.umd.edu/topic-modeling-in-the-humanities-an-overview/>> [accessed 21 June 2018]; Matthew Jockers, ‘The LDA Buffet Is Now Open; or, Latent Dirichlet Allocation for English Majors’, *Matthew Jockers*, 2019 <<http://www.matthewjockers.net/2011/09/29/the-lda-buffet-is-now-open-or-latent-dirichlet-allocation-for-english-majors/>> [accessed 21 June 2018]; Ted Underwood, ‘Topic Modeling Made Just Simple Enough’, *The Stone and the Shell. Using Large Digital Libraries to Advance Literary History*, 2012 <<https://tedunderwood.com/2012/04/07/topic-modeling-made-just-simple-enough/>> [accessed 21 June 2018].

<sup>27</sup> Allen Beye Riddell, ‘How to Read 22,198 Journal Articles: Studying the History of German Studies with Topic Models’, ed. by Matt Erlin and Lynne Tatlock (Rochester, N.Y. and Woodbridge, Suffolk: Camden House, 2014), pp. 91–114 (p. 102).

balance between the size of the corpora and the number of topics (too coarse and the patterns will not appear as meaningful, too fine-grain and they might not provide meaningful insights into intersecting patterns).<sup>28</sup> Running a topic model of a corpus therefore involves setting a number of topics to be discovered, a number of groups of words that cluster together, and the topic model will return a list of groups of words that statically cluster together within across texts in the corpus, i.e. a list of topics. Topic models provide you with a list of topics, and each topic is itself a list of words that represents a particular pattern of semantic frequency and distribution across the corpus. Where word frequency lists gave us frequencies of single words throughout corpora, topic modelling is a way to semantically group together words that frequently occur close to one another, to group together words by meaning where meaning is understood as patterns of co-occurrence of words.<sup>29</sup> Topic modelling allows for polysemy as words can occur across multiple topics, and the focus is on the distributional patterns of co-occurrences, not the words as such. The assumptions around meaning and meaningful construction in topic modelling aligns with discursive approaches to meaning. Meaning in topic modelling is understood as patterns of recurrence and co-occurrence, as patterns of cumulation and interrelation, and in discourse approaches meaning is understood through the accumulation and clustering of words together into meaningful patterns (articulations drawing on the field of discursivity), i.e. patterns of cumulation and interrelation (this will be discussed further in Chapter II).

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<sup>28</sup> Shawn Graham, Scott Weingart, and Ian Milligan, 'Getting Started with Topic Modeling and MALLET', *The Programming Historian*, 2012 <[programminghistorian.org/en/lessons/topic-modeling-and-mallet](http://programminghistorian.org/en/lessons/topic-modeling-and-mallet)>.

<sup>29</sup> Graham, Weingart, and Milligan.

Topic modelling results require specific software in order to read them, I have therefore chosen not to include topic modelling results in the appendixes since most users might not be able to read them.<sup>30</sup> I have however included images of particular topic modelling results that I discuss in the analyses so that the reader can have an idea of the kinds of visualisations involved in topic modelling.

### **Problems and limitations of working with computational methods specific to this project:**

Computational methodologies can be problematic when working with multi-lingual corpora. Computational tools function on the parsing and counting of precise strings of letters or words, any variation of language or variation within language (e.g. different spellings) can hinder and limit the use of computational tools. The strategy I have developed in this project to mitigate these issues involves dividing corpora by language and running computational analyses on different languages separately. Statistical patterns will therefore appear more clearly, and can be more meaningful, but it is a cumbersome method that involves retrospectively piecing together analyses on the same cultural contexts that are simply written in different languages. Furthermore, this strategy is still problematic with corpora related to the Swedish context since single sources and texts are often in multiple languages (e.g. edited volumes often contain a variety of different language, compared to edited volumes in English and German that are usually mainly in a single language). This is further compounded by the fact that NVivo does not have a Swedish dictionary incorporated, as discussed above, which means that statistically significant and

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<sup>30</sup> I would be happy to provide topic modelling results and the details on required software on request.

meaningful patterns to not appear as clearly in Swedish language corpora. Overall, I have made sure to organise my sources and run my queries in a way that would keep each language separate, and then I amalgamate the results afterwards so as to produce insightful results. It is rather unwieldy in analysis, but at least the patterns are more relevant and meaningful.

**A note on typographical conventions for discussing word frequency and topic modelling results:**

Words that appear in word frequency lists or topics will be marked in SMALL CAPS, in this way I can explicitly emphasise with an easy visual convention which words appear in topic modelling and word frequency results. Only the words that feature in word frequency lists or topic models will be marked in small caps. For example, if I write “des ESSEINTES”, then “ESSEINTES” appears in the key word list or topic I am discussing.

When discussing word frequency lists the frequency of the word will be listed next to the word in question: e.g. EYES (14th) means that the term “eyes” in this exact spelling is the 14th most frequent word in this particular corpus. The default is exact word frequency lists. If I am referring to the listing of EYES in a stemmed word frequency list I will specify “stemmed” after the listing number, e.g. EYES (14th stemmed) means that “eyes” and related words (e.g. “eye”) are the 14th most frequent group of words in this particular corpus. When multiple words are listed together the order of the words is reflected in the order of the frequency listings e.g. HUVUDET/HUVUD (151st/262nd) means that “huvudet” is the 151st most frequent word and “huvud” is the 262nd most frequent word in this particular corpus of texts.

### 3 - Rationale and Presentation of the Corpora

In this section, I will first present the corpora used in this project and provide a few pointers on typographical conventions for referring to the different corpora throughout the analyses. I will then discuss some of the decisions and issues involved in the process of digitising and curating a corpus for computational analysis. Finally, I will discuss the rationale of the corpora and how decisions were made on what sources to include. I will end with a brief note explaining the appendixes to this thesis, and how to use them.

#### Corpus Details:

The corpora used in the analyses in this thesis are divided into two overarching sets of corpora — corpora ranging from the 1870s to the 1910s, and corpora ranging from the 1920s to the 2010s (this will be discussed further below in relation to the rationale of the corpora). For the 1870s-1910s corpus, I have gathered texts by Thomas Mann, Friedrich Nietzsche, Hjalmar Söderberg and August Strindberg spanning the dates 1877 and 1914. Virtually all of Nietzsche's most well-known works, thirteen texts in total, are included here in this corpus. These include: *Die Geburt der Tragödie, Oder: Griechentum und Pessimismus* (1886) (i.e. 2nd edition which comprises the prefatory essay "Versuch eine Selbstkritik"); *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen* (1893); *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches. Ein Buch für freie Geister* (1878-1880); *Morgenröte. Gedanken über die moralischen Vorurteile* (1881); *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft. (la gaya scienza)* (1882); *Also sprach Zarathustra. Ein Buch für*



*Alle und Keine* (1883-1885); *Jenseits von Gut und Böse. Vorspiel einer Philosophie der Zukunft* (1886); *Zur Genealogie der Moral. Eine Streitschrift* (1887); *Der Fall Wagner. Ein Musikanten-Problem* (1888); *Götzen-Dämmerung oder Wie man mit dem Hammer philosophiert* (1889); “Vorwort” and “Wir Antipoden” and “Epilog” in *Nietzsche contra Wagner. Aktenstücke eines Psychologen* (1889) (I did not include most of *Nietzsche Contra Wagner* to avoid duplication since it is a collection of texts previously published); *Der Antichrist. Fluch auf das Christentum* (1889); *Ecce Homo. Wie man wird, was man ist* (written 1888-1889 published 1908).

Most of Mann’s works in his early period are included here: *Der kleine Herr Friedmann. Novellen* (1898) (this collection includes “Der kleine Herr Friedemann” (1896); “Der Tod” (1897); “Der Wille zum Glück” (1896); “Enttäuschung” (1896); “Der Bajazzo” (1897); “Tobias Mindernickel” (1898)); *Buddenbrooks. Verfall einer Familie* (1901); “Gladius Dei” (1902); *Tristan* (1902); *Tonio Kröger* (1903); “Schwere Stunde” (1905); *Königliche Hoheit. Roman* (1909) and *Der Tod in Venedig* (1912).

Seven texts by Söderberg are included in this corpus (five of these are short story collection, and two are novels): *Förvillelser* (1895); *Historietter* (1898); *Martin Bircks Ungdom* (1901); *Främlingarna* (1903); *Doktor Glas* (1905); *Det mörknar över vägen* (1907), and *Samtidsnoveller* (1921): Söderberg edited *Samtidsnoveller* in 1921, but the stories in this collection include stories previously published in the collections *Främlingarna* (1903), *Det mörknar över vägen* (1907) and *Den talangfulla draken* (1913). I have removed the stories that already appear in *Främlingarna* (1903) and *Det mörknar över vägen* (1907) to avoid repetition. An exception is the story “Generalkonsulns middagar”. This story is composed of six short stories: stories I to IV feature originally in *Främlingarna*, story V features originally in *Det mörknar över vägen* and story VI features in *Samtidsnoveller*. Therefore, in order to preserve integrity and

avoid repetition, all five stories feature in *Samtidsnoveller* and have been removed from *Främlingar* and *Det mörknar över vägen*.

Strindberg is an extremely prolific writer and produced a substantial amount of work between the 1870s and the 1910s. In selecting texts for this project, I have focussed on Strindberg's prose writing specifically his fictional prose (I have therefore not included his plays, the cultural historical works and the non-fiction works that he wrote in this period). I have included fifteen works by Strindberg in this corpus (thirteen novels and longer novellas, one short story collection and one short story): *Från Fjärdingen och Svartbäcken. Studier vid akademien* (1877); *Röda rummet. Skildringar ur artist- och författarlivet* (1879); *Tjänstekvinnans son. En själs utvecklingshistoria* (1886); *Hemsöborna. Skärgårdsberättelse* (1887); *Skärkarlsliv. Berättelser* (1888); *I havsbandet* (1890); *Tschandala* (1889 in Danish translation and then in Swedish in 1897); "De modärna?" (1890); *Inferno* (1897); *Legender and Jakob brottas. Ett fragment* (1898); *Ensam* (1903); *Götiska rummen. Släktöden från sekelslutet* (1904); *Svarta fanor. Sedeskildringar från sekelskiftet* (1907); *Taklagsöl. En berättelse* (1907); *Syndabocken. En berättelse* (1907).

Refer to Appendix 1 for further bibliographical details on the sources included in this 1870s-1910s corpus.

Most of the sources constituting the 1920s-2010s corpora are academic or scholarly texts (75 books/monographs, 17 edited volumes, 7 chapters from a book, 142 original articles, 39 review articles, 1 special issue, 8 doctoral theses, 3 excerpts of entries from encyclopaedias or dictionaries, 1 annotated bibliography, 1 summary of a book, and 1 call for papers and conference programme) exploring decadence (or a related concept, cf. further below in this section) at the fin de siècle. However, I have also included some sources which approach decadence as a broader, more general

term not necessarily considering it in relation to the fin de siècle specifically or focussing their analyses beyond the fin de siècle. For example: Barbara Stern in "Historical and personal nostalgia in advertising text: The fin de siècle effect" draws on the fin de siècle as general cultural concept (not the specific time period in itself) to understand and historicise modern nostalgia (and how nostalgia functions in advertising).<sup>31</sup> There are some sources that may be scholarly in content, but are intended for a wider reading public beyond academia. *History Today*, for example, is a UK-based magazine which wishes to "bring serious history to a wider audience."<sup>32</sup> The contributors to *History Today* are mainly scholars writing about topics within their expertise, but for a broader audience. Similarly, the German cultural journal *Merkur - Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken* is also intended for a wider audience beyond academia (*Merkur's* 2007 special issue of entitled "Kein Wille zur Macht. Dekadenz" is included in this corpus). The sources in this corpus are therefore mostly but not strictly scholarly, and approach decadence mostly but not strictly as a phenomenon related specifically to the fin de siècle.

Furthermore, sources included in this corpus do not all necessarily explicitly and/or exclusively deal with decadence proper. I have included sources that focus on concepts related to decadence namely, fin de siècle, modernity and degeneration.<sup>33</sup> I classified each one of the sources in this corpus to a theme/label (either decadence, modernity, fin de siècle or degeneration) — this is an interpretative choice and a matter of subjective discretion, but each source has been assigned to the theme/label which

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<sup>31</sup> Barbara Stern, 'Historical and Personal Nostalgia in Advertising Text: The Fin de Siècle Effect', *Journal of Advertising*, 21.4 (1992), 11–22.

<sup>32</sup> History Today website, accessed 10 October 2017 <<http://www.historytoday.com/about-us>>

<sup>33</sup> I also developed three smaller corpora relating to the subjects of Aestheticism, Jugendstil/Art Nouveau, Naturalism. Although I do not discuss them in the thesis, they played a role in the process of developing the analytical arc of this thesis.

arguably constitutes the predominant concern of the text. This classification is considered interpretative because there is strong overlap and sometimes lack of distinction between these different terms. However, I understand this high degree of overlap as further justification for comparing corpora related to these terms, since the ambiguities in distinction signal that these terms perform similar functions within similar areas of thought and social practice, but also that they cannot be strictly understood as synonymous and interchangeable (and indeed, this will be discussed further in analyses in Chapter IV-3). A total of 278 sources compose the 1920s-2010s corpus. 174 of these are specific to the theme/label of decadence. Of the remaining texts: 48 sources deal with the *fin de siècle*, 38 relate more specifically to modernity, 18 sources explore degeneration.

The corpora have been sorted according to and can be divided along different analytical lines that relate to different characteristics. The texts can be grouped together into different corpora in order to comparatively explore patterns of repetition and variation, of cumulation and interrelation, along different analytical lines. The structuring of the corpora is therefore systemic and permutational which allows for a flexibility of moving between different analytical perspectives and different scales of analysis. The structuring of the corpora can therefore be understood not as hierarchal but as cumulative in the way that it is deployed in these particular computational methodologies: I can gather together texts at higher levels of comparison, and also group together texts along more fine-grain levels of comparison depending on the analytical angle. Throughout the analytical process, in order to explore patterns of variation and repetition along different analytical lines, I distinguish and divide the corpora according to different characteristics, namely, the theme/label of the texts (i.e. whether the texts within the corpora relate to Decadence, Modernity, *Fin de Siècle* or

Degeneration) and the cultural contexts (i.e. whether the texts focus on the German or Swedish cultural context or whether they take a Comparative/General approach).<sup>34</sup> 90 sources in this 1920s-2010s corpus focus on the German context, whilst 26 sources focus on the Swedish context (there is an emphasis on Sweden, but sources also consider Danish, Norwegian and Finnish cultural contexts). 97 sources in the corpus adopt a comparative/European focus. These sources may consider decadence and related concepts comparatively;<sup>35</sup> or they may consider decadence and related concepts across different cultural contexts without necessarily comparing them;<sup>36</sup> and finally, they may also discuss decadence and/or related concepts as a general concept not explicitly tying it to a particular cultural context.<sup>37</sup> Sources have been selected to cover the whole range of the time frame (from 1919 to 2016) in order to develop a balanced long-term diachronic perspective of the conceptualisation of decadence.

In the process of elaborating the analyses in this thesis I explored a broader and more varied set of corpora than I can directly discuss here — I also considered texts from British, French and Austrian cultural contexts, and I also developed three smaller corpora relating to the subjects of Aestheticism, Jugendstil/Art Nouveau, Naturalism. For a complete list of all sources that I used throughout the whole project (not just for the analyses discussed directly in this thesis), consult Appendix 2 in which lists of sources are divided by theme/label and then subdivided by cultural context.

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<sup>34</sup> Although not discussed in detail, I also developed corpora for British and French contexts that I used for comparative purposes in the development of the analyses that lead to this thesis (word frequencies of sources assigned to the French cultural context and the Fin de Siècle theme/label will briefly be mentioned in Chapter IV-3).

<sup>35</sup> e.g. Rafael Koskimies, *Der Nordische Dekadent. Eine Vergleichende Literaturstudie* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1968).

<sup>36</sup> e.g. *Symbolism, Decadence and the Fin de Siècle. French and European Perspectives*, ed. by Patrick McGuinness (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2000).

<sup>37</sup> e.g. Gilman.

In my analyses of 1920s-2010s discussions of decadence, as will be presented in Chapter IV, I explore corpora that are grouped together according to language (this is a necessity of working with computational methods, as discussed above — cumulative patterns cannot be identified in multi-lingual texts), according to theme/label, and according to cultural contexts. When I am referring to a corpus, rather than the concepts of decadence or modernity, the themes/labels and cultural contexts of the corpora will be capitalised — i.e. when Decadence, Modernity, Fin de Siècle and Degeneration are capitalised this is to make clear that I am referring to the corpora as classified to these themes/labels. Furthermore, in order to make clear which corpora I am referring to, I will refer to the characteristics of the corpora in the order of cultural context, theme/label and language — for example, if I am discussing the corpus Swedish Decadence in German, then this corpus groups together texts that have been classified as relating to Decadence (as their theme/label) in the Swedish cultural context, and these texts are written in German. The corpora I discuss directly in my analyses of 1920s-2010s discussions of decadence as elaborated in the second part of Chapter IV (IV-2) include the corpora: German Decadence in English, German Decadence in German, Swedish Decadence in English, Swedish Decadence in Swedish, Comparative/European Decadence in English, Comparative/European Decadence in German. In the third part of Chapter IV (IV-3) I compare the discursive patterns of the Decadence corpora (as listed above), with discursive patterns in the Modernity, Fin de Siècle and Degeneration corpora which include: German Modernity in English, German Modernity in German, Swedish Modernity in English, Swedish Modernity in Swedish for the Modernity corpora. The Fin de Siècle corpora include: Comparative/European Fin de Siècle in English, German Fin de Siècle in English, German Fin de Siècle in German, Swedish Fin de Siècle in English, Swedish Fin de

Siècle in French and Swedish Fin de Siècle in Swedish. And finally, the Degeneration corpora include: Comparative/European Degeneration in English, Comparative/European Degeneration in German, German Degeneration in English and German Degeneration in German. Appendixes 11-30 list the specific texts that are included in each of these corpora (the lists are too long to explicitly enumerate here).

### **Curating and cleaning the corpus:**

Gathering, processing and curating my sources before even deploying computational methods on them may seem like a straightforward process, but it is already fraught with interpretative choices and decisions. I will discuss here the process of elaborating and curating corpora for computational analyses from scratch, and the ways in which the translation of texts from analogue to digital format can already bring to the fore a number of interpretative choices that will have repercussion in the analyses. It should be noted that there may be ready-made corpora available for use in textual analyses, but elaborating your own corpora for analysis can ensure that a specialised corpora of relevant sources is used, and that interpretative choices in the curating of the corpora align with the analytical aims of the project.

Once I determined a list of sources (as will be discussed further below in the rationale of the elaboration of corpora), I proceeded to gather the material, and digitise the sources that were not yet digitised (this means scanning the sources and making them computer-readable through Optical Character Recognition software). When using computational methods, the representation of texts needs to be modified: “it is first necessary to represent text in a way that is understandable to the computer.”<sup>38</sup> This

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<sup>38</sup> David Mimno, ‘Computational Historiography: Data Mining in a Century of Classics Journals’, *Journal on Computing and Cultural Heritage*, 5.1 (2012), n/a (p. 4).

translation, however, similarly to other processes of translation, involves interpretative choices. My project is clearly heavily reliant on language and the subtleties of language, and computers do not read language in the same ways that humans do which means that a significant amount of curation is needed to prepare the data in such a way that we can productively perform the computational methods we are interested in. Computational queries return exactly what is typed — computational reading recognises words and language by the exact string of characters that have been entered. In this context, errors and mistypes that are not usually problematic can have an impact on the analyses — humans will usually easily deduce a word that is mistyped from context, computers, however, will not count a word that is mistyped since the string of characters does not directly match the string of characters it has been asked to count. There are ways of introducing a bit of flexibility and ambiguity in computational queries (with special characters such as wildcards), but the strength of analysis will ultimately depend on how well the data have been cleaned and curated.

A crucial step in the elaboration of corpora for computational analysis is therefore “cleaning” the data. How thoroughly the data are cleaned will influence how “noisy” the results will be: if you have checked that each source is formatted properly for optimum computer readability (in accordance with the methods you are using and queries you want to perform) your result will be much more rigorous and meaningful than if the data are not properly curated. The process of scanning and OCRing the sources (translating analogue text formats into digital text formats) introduces a number of spelling and typography errors (on top of usual human errors such as typos). For example, OCRing may recognise the word “modern” as “modem”. Similarly, “d  cadence” might be recognised as “decadence,” and the distinction is important in the context of this research project. After OCRing, therefore, I checked, as diligently as



possible, that no spelling mistakes had been introduced, and I corrected typos even if they were present in the analogue texts. I have uniformised spelling as far as possible (e.g. older spellings and verb forms of Swedish have been uniformised to modern spellings and verb forms). There are also specificities of the software to take into account. For example, NVivo counts hyphenated words as two separated words (for the word “short-lived” NVivo will count two words: “short” and “lived”). I have uniformised as far as possible the sources by hyphenating words with particular prefixes (“self-,” “post-,” “anti-,” “over-”) as I wanted to be able to search for these prefixes in themselves as they may be suggestive of discursive patterns and subtleties (this would not otherwise be possible since they all prefix different words). However, I did not, as far as possible, hyphenate “un-” since I did not want to amalgamate negatively inflected words with positively inflected words. Thus, I have ensured as far as possible a homogenous orthography, typography and spelling across texts and corpora so that patterns relevant to my research questions and interests could be detected.

In this context, typography and layout also become an issue to consider: a page-break breaks up the flow of an ongoing sentence such that the software no longer recognises these words as being close to one other and in the same context. It was therefore necessary to keep the text as run-on text. It was also necessary to remove repeated titles and bibliographies since these could skew word counts (e.g. if “decadence” features in a book’s title and the title is repeated at the top of every page of the book then this will over-represent how many times decadence mentioned in text, and it will make decadence appear as co-occur with parts of the text with which it might not in fact be co-occurring). Similarly, footnotes have been removed unless the footnote added to or extended the argument developed in the text in a significance way

in which case the footnote was moved to the end of the document so as not to interfere with the flow of text.

These processes of cleaning the data are therefore already paving the way towards interpretative decisions and considerations. Another significant analytical and interpretative choice is of course the selection of the texts themselves.

### **Rationale of the corpora:**

The aim of this project is to develop an innovative approach to conceptualising and articulating the relations between language, meaning and social and cultural reality at the fin de siècle and in relation to decadence in particular (as a particularly significant concept in relation to the fin de siècle). The fin de siècle is a time of particularly intense destabilisation, reformulation and exploration, and decadence is understood as a significant resource and strategy for stimulating and unfolding these destabilisations, reformulations and explorations. To formalise and explore how decadence contributes to these processes of intense reformulation, decadence is conceptualised in this project through theories of (re)signification and meaning enabled by computational methods. Processes of meaningful elaboration are understood to be unfolded through semantic patterns of self-reference and self-differentiation (i.e. areas of semantic tensions — this is in particular related to re-entry in Luhmann's systems theory), cumulation and interrelation (i.e. patterns of frequency and intersection, how words cluster together to make meaningful semantic groups, and the way in which they combine to explore different meaningful configurations — this is in particular related to field of discursivity and articulation in Laclau and Mouffe discourse theory). The combination of these theoretical resources for conceptualising the processes of (re)signification with computational methods can therefore allow to explore how

decadence contributes to the destabilisation, reformulation and exploration of different areas of cultural experience and understanding by exploring patterns of cumulation and interrelation, and patterns of semantic tension, of self-reference and self-differentiation, at different scales across different texts that relate to decadence (and other related concepts). This approach therefore provides innovative ways of understanding and formalising these processes of reformulation through which I can explore particular discursive and semantic strands and areas that emerge as significant areas of reformulation, and develop new analytical insights into how these reformulations and explorations unfold. This research therefore revolves around identifying and exploring how decadence as meaningful and textual resource has been conceptualised, and how it is unfolded. The main aim in the elaboration of these corpora, therefore, is to develop a corpus that is broad (for cumulative patterns to emerge), and representative of decadence — i.e. that is diverse (to represent a plurality of different texts, uses and conceptualisations of decadence), but also coheres around decadence. For analytical purposes, the corpus elaborated for analyses in this thesis has been subdivided into two broad corpora of texts along primarily temporal lines and secondarily generic lines. The purpose of this is to compare the recurrent patterns of cumulation and interrelation and of semantic tension that can be explored in contemporary conceptualisations and realisations of decadence as meaningful textual strategy and resource with the patterns of cumulation and interrelation and of semantic tension that can be identified in subsequent research literature on decadence and related concepts. These comparisons can inform one another in order to stimulate different perspectives on how decadence can be conceptualised and explored as particular process of (re)signification. These analyses survey a broad range of texts related to decadence (and associated concepts) in order to analytically harness as comparative foil to one

another the variations between critical conceptualisations of decadence in subsequent research literature, and critical conceptualisations and literary performances of decadence in contemporary texts. One set of corpora is constituted of texts drawn from the 1870s and 1910s, and the other set of corpora is constituted of texts drawn from the 1920s-2010s.

In relation to the 1870s-1910s corpora, the rationale underpinning the elaboration of these corpora, as mentioned above, was to create a broad set of corpora (necessary for an exploration of cumulative patterns in language), yet still equally balanced between the cultural contexts explored in this project (the corpora related to Mann and Söderberg are smaller (fewer words on average) whereas the corpora related to Strindberg and Nietzsche are larger). These corpora also need to be diverse, yet to still coherently relate to decadence at the fin de siècle in Germany and Sweden. The main aim was therefore to develop corpora that would be widely accepted as associated with decadence at the fin de siècle in Germany and Sweden in order to explore how received understanding on decadence can be refined or reframed through the particular theoretical and methodological approach as developed in this project. The corpora were therefore elaborated around four representative figures of decadence at the fin de siècle with two from Germany and two from Sweden. If we look at word frequency lists of the various Decadence corpora, we can see that Nietzsche and Mann consistently recur as frequent figures across these Decadence corpora. Nietzsche emerges as frequent figure across all corpora except for the Swedish Decadence corpus in English (NIETZSCHE is 2nd most frequent term in the German Decadence corpus in English; 32nd most frequent term in the corpus on German Decadence in German; 126th most frequent term in the Swedish Decadence corpus in Swedish; 30th most frequent term in the Comparative/European Decadence corpus in

English, and 103rd most frequent term in the Comparative/European Decadence corpus in German). Even though Nietzsche's writing differs in terms of genre compared to the other predominantly literary texts, the aim is to compare writing on decadence at the fin de siècle with later conceptualisations of decadence. Furthermore, the Nietzsche corpus is a useful comparative bridge between the conceptualisation and performance of decadence as process of (re)signification in critical and philosophical texts with more literary conceptualisations and performances of decadence as process of (re)signification. MANN also recurs as frequent figure across the German Decadence corpora (5th most frequent term in the corpus on German Decadence in English; 27th in the German Decadence corpus in German).

Although there are no clearly frequently recurring figures across the Swedish Decadence corpora, in the corpus on Swedish Decadence in Swedish STRINDBERG occurs as a frequent figure (66th most frequent term). Strindberg is a central literary figure in Swedish literature of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, and his versatility and experimentation with different literary styles throughout his literary career make him an interesting comparative counterpoint in this corpus.<sup>39</sup> The particular texts included in this corpus of Strindberg's writing include texts from what could be called Strindberg's early satirical and social criticism writing phase (e.g. *Från Fjärdingen och Svartbäcken. Studier vid akademien* (1877). And *Röda rummet. Skildringar ur artist- och författarlivet* (1879)), his first auto-fictional phase and period of interest in Nietzsche (with texts such as *Tschandala* (1889/1897); *Tjänstekvinnans son. En själs utvecklingshistoria* (1886) and the trilogy of texts set in the Stockholm

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<sup>39</sup> cf. Itamar Even-Zohar, 'Polysystem Theory', *Poetics Today*, Special Issue Polysystem Studies, 11.1 (1990), 9–26 (p. 20); Inga-Stina Ewbank, 'August Strindberg (1849-1912)', in *Aspects of Modern Swedish Literature*, ed. by Irene Scobbie, 2nd edn (Norwich, UK: Norvik Press, 1999), pp. 31–73.

archipelago: *Hemsöborna. Skärgårdsberättelser* (1887), *Skärkarlsliv. Berättelser* (1888), *I havsbandet* (1890)), and finally his Inferno phase which included a second auto-fictional phase of writing and a return to social criticism (with texts such as *Inferno* (1897); *Legender* and *Jakob brottas. Ett fragment* (1898); *Ensam* (1903); *Götiska rummen. Släktöden från sekelslutet* (1904); *Svarta fanor. Sedelskildringar från sekelskiftet* (1907); *Taklagsöl. En berättelse* (1907); *Syndabocken. En berättelse* (1907)). Söderberg on the other hand is often associated more precisely with the Swedish literary fin de siècle in particular.<sup>40</sup> Söderberg is therefore a useful figure in this project as a representative figure of late nineteenth century Swedish literature in particular, and can therefore serve as a useful comparative foil to Strindberg who is usually perceived as a key figure in Swedish modern literature more generally (he is often identified as the pioneer of modern literature in Sweden with his novel *Röda rummet*).<sup>41</sup> Each of these authors whose texts constitute the 1870s-1910s corpora are therefore recurring figures in research on decadence and the fin de siècle. Yet they are still a diverse group of writers: not only do they occupy related but different cultural contexts, but they also each have different particularities and interests, and are more or less closely associated to decadence in different ways. The 1870s-1910s corpora therefore constitute a balanced, representative, coherent yet also diverse group of texts around the core theme of decadence.

Similarly, a central concern when elaborating the 1920s-2010s corpus is to ensure that it is balanced and representative of the scholarly and critical discourse on decadence from 1919 to 2016. The main aim when elaborating the corpus was to have

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<sup>40</sup> cf. Geddes, *Hj. Söderberg: Doktor Glas*, p. 30; Geddes, 'Swedish Fin-de-Siècle: Hjalmar Söderberg (1869-1941)'.

<sup>41</sup> Scobbie and Thompson, p. 9.

a representative corpus of sources with a broad scope, comprising a well-rounded set of sources that still cohere around the particular focus of this thesis whilst remaining representative of the diversity of approaches and contexts through which the term circulates. The corpus therefore needs to include sources that occupy a central position in the discourse under research as well as texts that focus particularly specific topic of research (decadence in Germany and Sweden at the fin de siècle), and texts that adopt a more unusual, original or peripheral approach to the topic.

Assessing the centrality of a text is not a straightforward process, but I have generally assumed that texts that play a central role in shaping the discourse on decadence are the texts that are most recurrent in research over the years. One way of tracking the recurrence of a texts in other texts is citation. With the digitisation of more and more scholarly sources and the launch of Google Scholar in 2004, citation metrics have become a popular tool for measuring the “keyness” of scholarly texts. Of course, when measurements become an end in themselves, this creates problematic issues, and I am not arguing that citations are a reliable measure of academic or scholarly credibility or value. Rather, in the context of elaborating this corpus, citations constitute a useful potential indicator of the movement of texts within academic landscapes, and a means of tracking the recurrence and frequency of particular texts within this field of research. In elaborating this corpus I therefore investigated citation metrics in Google Scholar and in online journal databases since they provide a useful measurement of the position of a text within the publication landscape on a particular topic by flagging up the numbers of citations of a particular text as well as indicated which texts cite that particular text or are in some way related to that particular text. I also searched Google Scholar for top hits when entering the key terms “decadence,” “dekadenz,” “dekadens,” “German Dekadenz,” “Scandinavian Decadence,” “degeneration,” “fin de siècle” and

“modernity” as a further means of identifying key sources (these meta-data, e.g. number of citations, etc. are included in the corpus breakdown in Appendix 2). However, for the corpus to be representative, other ways of searching and finding relevant sources need to be used in combination with citation metrics in order to develop a diverse and representative corpus. I therefore combed through the bibliographies of thirty sources which range over my timeframe and variety of topics, and which I believe are authoritative and key sources in the field, in order to create a list of sources that recurred most often across different sources, were most relevant to my topic of research, whilst also encompassing a broad variety of perspectives and approaches.<sup>42</sup> I also added sources from my own bibliographical lists that I had drawn up throughout researching the subject over the years as well as from annotated bibliographies dealing with the topic (namely Dowling’s *Aestheticism and Decadence* (1977)).

## Appendixes:

An index of the appendixes to this thesis can be found at the end of the thesis (p. 381). This provides details on the information to be found in each appendix in order

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<sup>42</sup> I combed through the bibliographies of 30 sources: Bauer, *Die schöne Décadence*; Bernheimer, *Decadent Subjects*; Birkett, *The Sins of the Fathers*; Carter, *The Idea of Decadence*; de Ryals, “Toward a Definition of Decadent as Applied to British Literature of the 19th century;” Fewster, “Bourget and the Critical Response to Decadence in Austria and Germany;” Gilman, *Decadence. The Strange Life of an Epithet*; Gogroß-Voorhees, *Defining Modernism*; Hardin, “Fin de siècle in German and Scandinavian Contexts;” Kafitz, *Dekadenz in Deutschland*; Krobb, “Decadence and Crisis in Fin de siècle German and Austrian Discours;” McGuinness, *Symbolism, Fin de siècle and Decadence*; Miller, “Reflections on Decadence;” Mix, *Hansers Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur 1890-1918*; Morley, “Decadence as a Theory of History;” Müller, *Dekadenzproblem in Österreich*; Peters, “Toward an ‘Un-Definition’ of Decadent as Applied to British Literature of the 19th century;” Pittock, *Spectrum of Decadence*; Potolsky, “Forms and/of Decadence;” Praz, *The Romantic Agony*; Pross, *Dekadenz*; Rasch, “Literary Decadence - Artistic Representations of Decay;” Reed, *Decadent Style*; Schoolfield, *A Baedeker of Decadence*; Scobbie, *Aspects of Modern Swedish Literature*; Thornton, *The Decadent Dilemma*; Weir, *Decadence and the Making of Modernism*; Ziegler, *Asymptote*.



to help the reader navigate the different appendixes. Appendix 1 lists all sources that are included in the 1870s-1910s corpora (analysed in Chapter III). Appendix 2 lists all the sources that were used throughout the project in developing analyses of the 1920s-2010s corpora. Appendixes 11-30 list the sources for the specific corpora that are directly discussed in analyses in Chapter IV. Appendixes 5-10 provide the word frequency lists of the Mann, Nietzsche, Söderberg and Strindberg corpora as analysed in Chapter III. Appendixes 31-67 provide the word frequency lists of the 1920s-2010s corpora that are directly discussed in analyses in Chapter IV, i.e. word frequency lists of the Decadence, Fin de Siècle, Modernity and Degeneration corpora relating to German, Swedish and Comparative/European cultural contexts. Appendixes 3 and 4 show how frequent words from the raw word frequency lists were progressively filtered and grouped into meaningful semantic clusters for the 1870s-1910s corpora and the 1920s-2010s corpora respectively. These appendixes provide an insight into one of the steps in the analytical process of working with these computational methods as will be discussed in the following section.

## **4 - Details of the Analytical Process**

In this section I discuss in more detail the analytical process from which this thesis emerged. It is a fundamentally iterative process that involves the repeated clustering, filtering and refining of analytical insights through an oscillation and comparison between different scales of analysis, types of analysis and textual permutations. Even though I may present this process in sequential steps as I discuss the analytical

process, these analyses were elaborated through iterations between these different interpretative steps and types of analysis, and I will also try and provide a sense of these iterative processes throughout this discussion.

There are two main computational tools that I use (word frequency queries — sometimes also associated with concordance queries — and topic modelling), and there are two main overarching sets of corpora — 1870s-1910s corpora and 1920s-2010s corpora. The analysis first developed through an exploratory phase (not directly visible in this thesis). In the exploratory phase, I run a number of word frequency queries and topic modelling on a number of different permutations of the corpora, and survey, compare and contrasts the results. This stimulates an initial exploration of coarse patterns that can be identified, and this also enables me to explore which levels and scales of analysis might be most relevant and revealing for more in-depth analyses. In relation to the 1870s-1910s corpora as analysed in Chapter III, for example, I generated, in the exploratory phase, word frequency lists on corpora divided by language, divided by author, and for each individual text in the corpus. Similarly, I generated topic models for corpora divided by language, divided by author and for each individual text in the corpus, and I also run for each of these corpora a range of topic models with different parameters — I always use 3000 iterations since this is more than sufficient for developing stabilised topic models in relation to my corpora, but I vary the number of topics that the computer can assume to exist in the texts. For each of these corpora, I run topic models for 5, 7, 10, 15, 20, 50, 70 and 100 topics to be found in the corpora. This provides different topic models that explore more or less coarse and fine-grain patterns of cumulation and interrelation across the corpora. This therefore again suggests which levels and scales of analysis (both in terms of which permutations and cumulations of texts, and in terms of which topic

model settings) are most revealing. In the exploratory phase for the 1920s-2010s corpora, I run word frequency queries on a number of different groupings of texts — on all sources (only divided by language as demanded by using computational methods), on all sources divided by theme/label and language (all sources labelled Decadence, Fin de Siècle, Degeneration, Modernity and Aestheticism, Expressionism, Jugendstil, Naturalism and Realism), on all sources divided theme/label as well as cultural context and language (i.e. all sources that relate to Decadence in the Austrian context, in the British Context, in the Comparative/European context, in the French context, in the German context and in the Swedish context, and similarly for the other themes/labels of Fin de Siècle, Degeneration, Modernity and Aestheticism, Expressionism, Jugendstil, Naturalism and Realism). I also run topic models on those different permutations of texts (all sources divided by language, all sourced divided by theme/label and language, all sources divide cultural context, theme/label and language), and for each of these corpora permutations I vary the “number of topics” parameter which sets the number of semantic clusters into which the topic model sorts distributions of words. I, therefore, as above, run topic models for each of these corpora permutations with parameters of 3000 iterations, and with number of topics set at 5, 7, 10, 15, 20, 50, 70 and 100 topics.

This exploratory phase therefore gives me a sense of the patterns that recur across the corpora (and across my two main sets of corpora 1920s-2010s and 1870s-1910s) and that may be particularly relevant in further analyses. Moreover, this exploratory phase enables me to identify the kinds of levels, scales and settings that

will be most relevant and revealing for more in-depth analyses.<sup>43</sup> This discussion of the analytical process should make apparent how working with computational methods involves an iteration between particular analytical choices, interests and instincts — expertise of a subject directs attention and expectation towards particular patterns — and the statistical patterns as revealed through computational analyses — expertise is used to evaluate which patterns appear as significant and meaningful, some of the expectations may be confirmed, but also some may be subverted or need to be reconsidered and modified when confronted with the computational reconfiguration of texts. In fact, in this project, the engagement with computational methods in the exploratory phase informed the very approach, as developed in Chapters I and II, for considering decadence as process of (re)signification and meaningful elaboration. The striking number of patterns of semantic tensions, of self-reference and self-differentiation, repetition and variation, cumulation and interrelation as revealed in computational reconfigurations of the texts led to a rethinking and revision of the analytical framework underpinning this project in terms of processes of (re)signification.

After the initial exploratory phase, I then focus in on particular sets of corpora that emerge as potentially most relevant for further analysis. For the analyses of the 1870s-2010s corpora, as discussed in Chapter III, I develop word frequency lists on the corpora divided by author (i.e. I compare word frequency lists of all texts written by Mann, all texts written by Nietzsche, all texts written by Söderberg, and all texts written by Strindberg) since these corpora are still broad enough to explore significant cumulative patterns, but also particularised enough to explore significant differences

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<sup>43</sup> I do not include word frequency lists used in the exploratory phase in the appendixes since I do not discuss them directly in the analyses in this thesis, but I am happy to provide these word frequency lists on request.

and overlaps. For the topic modelling of the 1870s-2010s corpora however, I develop topic models for these corpora divided by language (all sources in German, i.e. all sources by Mann and Nietzsche, and all sources in Swedish, i.e. sources by Söderberg and Strindberg) since the corpora divided by language are broad enough to reveal significant patterns. In relation to the 1920s-2010s corpora discussed in Chapter IV, I develop word frequency lists and topic models for the corpora relating to the theme/label Decadence and divided by cultural context (and language), and I focus on the German and Swedish contexts as well as Comparative/European contexts (since the German and Swedish contexts are the focus of this thesis, and the Comparative/European context can include perspectives on these contexts as well as provide a comparative foil to the corpora focussing more specifically on Germany and Sweden). I therefore generate word frequency lists and topic models for the corpora of German Decadence in English (all sources labelled “Decadence” and related to the German cultural context in the English language), German Decadence in German, Swedish Decadence in English, Swedish Decadence in Swedish, Comparative/European Decadence in English and Comparative European Decadence in German. These analyses of the discursive and semantic patterns of the Decadence corpora are also compared to corpora categorised at other labels. This time, I only use in analyses word frequency lists on the corpora labelled Modernity, Fin de Siècle and Degeneration, and that relate to the German, Swedish and Comparative/European cultural contexts — i.e. I develop word frequency lists for German Modernity in English (all sources labelled Modernity and related to the German cultural context in English), German Modernity in German, Swedish Modernity in English, Swedish Modernity in Swedish, Comparative/European Fin de Siècle in English, German Fin de Siècle in English, German Fin de Siècle in German, Swedish Fin de Siècle in English, Swedish

Fin de Siècle in French, Swedish Fin de Siècle in Swedish, Comparative/European Degeneration in English, Comparative/European Degeneration in German, German Degeneration in English and German Degeneration in German.

The general analytical process, therefore, revolves around comparing word frequency lists and topic models within and across the 1870s-1910s corpora and the 1920s-2010s corpora, and comparing the discursive patterns as developed through word frequency lists and topic models of the 1870s-1910s corpora with those of the 1920s-2010s corpora. This process identifies discursive patterns that appear as relevant for the overarching analytical arc of the thesis, and these patterns are then compared and unfolded further into more detailed analyses through comparison of different corpora within the 1870s-1910s and 1920s-2010s sets of corpora. The results of word frequency queries and topic models are therefore not analyses in themselves, but are a starting point for an iterative process of analytical comparison and refinement that will explore how these results could be analytical significant and revealing. I will provide here more specific details about I specially refine these raw computational results into analyses.

I have a set of corpora that I want to analyse, compare and contrast. I run word frequency queries for each of these corpora. These raw word frequency lists are not initially particularly revealing. Rather, through an iterative process of comparing, filtering and clustering I develop from these raw word frequency lists meaningful and significant semantic clusters or discursive patterns. Word frequency lists indicate the patterns of cumulation across different corpora — the words that are most recurrent. I survey, compare and contrast different word frequency lists for each corpus, and elaborate semantic groupings from frequent words across these corpora. This therefore involves a process of oscillation and iteration between a number of analytical tasks

such as comparing and contrasting between different permutations of corpora, filtering and reworking lists of key words in order to group terms together into meaningful and significant discursive patterns (which could involve re-presenting the patterns of word frequency by writing up relevant words and colour-coding them to make patterns more apparent, or drawing up Venn diagrams by hand to visualise the interconnections and interrelations between different semantic clusters), running concordance queries (seeing every occurrence of the word in context) on particular terms in order to explore how a term is used in context so as to decide whether a term is significant or not and how it relates to the analyses. The relevance and significance of most frequently recurring words therefore emerge from an iterative analytical process of comparison between corpora.

The meaningful and significant semantic clusters or discursive patterns are also elaborated by comparing word frequency lists with topic models. Topic models re-present patterns of distribution, of cumulation and interrelation across the corpora by analysing words that frequently appear close to another. Topic models can therefore provide further insights into discursive patterns of cumulation and interrelation across the corpora. The way in which I cluster together recurrent words from word frequency lists into semantic groupings is a similar process to the statistical re-presenting of patterns of distribution and intersection that topic models perform. Topic modelling is a method for grouping together semantically related words. Whilst I use my knowledge, discretion and expertise to group together semantically related words from lists of the most frequent words across the corpora into meaningful clusters, topic modelling re-present groups of semantically related words deduced from statistical patterns of distribution of words across corpora since topic modelling methods assume that words that frequently occur close to one another will be semantically related in some

meaningful way. An analysis of topic models can therefore provide a comparative foil to my own deductions of semantically related clusters from word frequency lists. Because topic modelling identifies patterns of co-occurrence across texts it can provide a sense of how these semantically related clusters intersect and interrelate by identifying which words recurrently appear close to one another. The combination of word frequency lists and topic models provides an initial insight into the frequent and recurring patterns of semantic cumulation, tensions and interrelations across the texts. Furthermore, a comparison of these patterns elaborated from the 1870s-1910s corpora with patterns from the 1920s-2010s corpora inform which semantic patterns and clusters may be particularly revealing to explore further.

Within the 1920s-2010s corpora, as analysed in Chapter IV, a comparison between discursive patterns in and across the Decadence corpora with discursive patterns in and across the Modernity, Fin de Siècle and Degeneration corpora bring to light significant patterns of self-reference and self-differentiation between these corpora (this is discussed in IV-3 in particular). The analyses of recurring semantic patterns of cumulation as drawn from word frequency lists highlight how decadence both overlaps in significant ways with each of these corpora, but also keeps other discursive possibilities open. These patterns of self-reference and self-differentiation can productively be framed and formalised in terms of theories of (re)signification as discussed in Chapter II — decadence can be understood as functioning as the unmarked side of the distinction in the process of re-entry, or as the open field of discursivity in relation to these corpora. This provides new ways of flexibly conceptualising the interrelation and differentiation between different aspects of fin de siècle culture and debates as well as suggests further analytical avenues of investigation by indicating and providing means to explore further the variety of ways in



which different meaningful patterns are realised into different discursive configurations. The discussions in this section therefore serve to concretise and detail further the approach to decadence developed throughout this thesis as opening up resources and strategies for playing out and exploring processes of (re)signification.

The discursive patterns discussed in IV-3 are derived from a process of filtering and comparing word frequency lists into recurrent semantic clusters (as discussed above). This is the focus of the second section in Chapter IV (IV-2) in which the German, Swedish and Comparative/European Decadence corpora are compared and contrasted. In elaborating the recurring semantic clusters from word frequency lists, I survey the first few hundred most frequent words as listed in word frequency lists for each of the corpora and identify some initial patterns. I then group together frequently recurring semantically-related words into overarching discursive clusters derived from the recurrent patterns identified. This is an intermediate analytical step in the iterative filtering and comparing process between raw word frequency lists and the more stabilised and abstracted discursive domains I ultimately use to structure my analyses of recurring discursive strands and interactions in research on decadence. Appendixes 31–67 contain the raw word frequency lists for the 1920s-2010s corpora analysed in Chapter IV, and Appendix 4 provides the intermediate analytical step between raw word frequency lists and the more stabilised and abstracted discursive domains later used in the analyses. The recurrent semantic clusters initially identified (as can be found in Appendix 4) are then further refined and abstracted into:

- (a) the discursive domain of the self, subjectivity, individuality, self-reflection and self-consciousness;
- (b) the discursive domain of time, temporality, historical self-consciousness and historical self-positioning;

(c) words that relate to issues and aspects of society, culture and politics, particularly: terms of collectivity and individuality; gender and sexuality; religion and spirituality; ideas and ideology;

(d) the discursive domain of art and literature;

(e) words that relate to comprehension, understanding, perception and processes of representation, structuring, shaping and organising;

(f) categorical labels or concepts (i.e. decadence, degeneration, fin de siècle, modernity) and key figures (e.g. Nietzsche, Baudelaire).

And in a final analytical iteration of further abstraction and filtering I conceptualise these categories as relating to the fundamental discursive domains of TIME (this includes strand (b) listed above), SELF (this includes strand (a) listed above), WORLD (this includes strand (c) listed above) and ART (this includes strands (d) and (e) listed above). I elaborate these key overarching discursive domains of SELF, TIME, WORLD (i.e. key social, political, cultural and ideological issues) and ART in order to help formalise and anchor my analyses, and not get overwhelmed by the possible patterns of cumulation and interrelation. The recurring notions of SELF, TIME, WORLD and ART can therefore be understood as overarching discursive domains and guiding threads along which to explore discursive tensions and interrelations within and across corpora (both 1920s-2010s corpora and 1870s-1910s corpora, as I will discuss later on).

From a comparison between topic models and my analyses of word frequency lists, I formalise how these discursive domains intersect in ways that point towards particular semantic tensions and configurations that are particularly meaningful and relevant to the analyses developed in this thesis. At the intersections of the domains of TIME/SELF/WORLD, I identify discursive configurations that relate to historical and temporal self-positioning and self-consciousness. Discursive patterns at the

intersection of these domains suggest a particular temporal self-consciousness emerging at the time, and shifts in the conceptualisation of time and in temporal experience are explored here as unfolding in the interplay between pessimism and optimism, decline and renewal. At the intersections of the domains SELF/WORLD, there are recurrent patterns that relate to the reformulation of notions of self, subjectivity and collectivity which are played out around tensions between individuality or subjectivity and collectivity. At the intersections of the discursive domains of ART/SELF/WORLD, semantic patterns suggest the emergence of a self-consciousness of art as a particular cultural practice for making sense and developing coherence. These relate to reformulations of the role of art and the artist at this time, and to the self-conscious positioning of art as privileged domain for human and cultural exploration, and facilitator of broader debates which play out around tensions between art and life, and through interrelations between recurrent semantics of art, understanding, expression and perception (particularly physical or bodily perception). The overarching analytical domains of time, art, self and world therefore allow me to formalise and give structure to subsequent more in-depth analyses of patterns of cumulation and interrelation, and to link these to contextualised analyses of relevant issues at the *fin de siècle*. The intersections between the overarching analytical domains point to areas of significant debate and reformulation at the *fin de siècle*, and the more specific patterns of tension that can be identified at the intersection of these broad domains — namely tensions between renewal and decline, collectivity and individuality, and art and life — serve as guiding threads and comparative foil in the elaboration of analyses in Chapter III in relation to the 1870s-1910s corpora.

For the 1870s-1910s corpora as analysed in Chapter III, Appendix 3 provides insight into the intermediate analytical step of how I refined the most frequently

recurring words across the raw word frequency lists into significant semantic groupings. These then serve as guiding threads for the more in-depth exploration and analysis of recurring patterns of tensions and interrelations across these corpora. The recurrent semantic groupings I identified in Appendix 3 are:

- parts of the body, terms relating to physicality and size;
- terms relating to movement, posture, positioning and space and spatiality;
- terms relating to interiors and exteriors, collectivity and individuality, social titles and roles and family structures and figures;
- terms relating to human experience, spirituality and religion, human and social values, expression and communication;
- terms of perception, apprehension and understanding;
- and semantics of time and temporality.

A comparison with topic models drawn from these corpora of texts (divided by language) suggest the dynamics of interplay and interrelation between these recurring semantic clusters. In particular, semantics of physicality and parts of the body intersect with semantics of space and spatiality as well as semantics of perception, apprehension, understanding and semantics of inwardness and human experience. This suggests particular tensions between physicality and inwardness, and interiorities and exteriorities more generally — spaces and places, physical appearances intersect with interior, psychological states. Semantics of subjectivity and selfhood can also be understood to interrelate with semantics of collectivity and social roles which suggests the playing out of tensions between individuality and collectivity.

These patterns are then used to reframe and unfold particular aspects of certain texts in these corpora in close readings of *Der Fall Wagner* by Nietzsche, *Tristan*, *Tonio Kröger* and *Der Tod in Venedig* by Mann, *Doktor Glas* by Söderberg, and *I*

*havsbandet* by Strindberg. In section III-2-A, the tensions between individuality and collectivity reframe analyses of notions of case and type in *Der Fall Wagner* and in *Tristan* and *Tonio Kröger* through which different aspects of tensions between individuality and collectivity in the reformulation of self and community can be explored. Furthermore, processes of repetition and variation within and across texts configure and explore further models of interaction and interrelation between collectivity and individuality. Tensions between collectivity and individuality also draw attention to and reframe, in III-2-C, how these texts self-consciously foreground the intertextual webs of references and generic resources that constitute the texts themselves. This destabilises notions of authenticity and imitation by exposing and exploring the very process of creative and meaningful elaboration. Furthermore, self-conscious patterns of intertextual references also foreground, in III-2-B, the elaboration of the experience and notion of self as taking place through intersections between individuality and collectivity. Patterns of intertextual references serve to substantiate notions of self, whilst exterior events, landscapes and places are mediated through the protagonist's inner state of mind. Spaces and place, physical characteristics, i.e. exteriorities, therefore become mediations and markers of internal states and processes. This relates to the tensions between physicality and inwardness, interiors and exteriors.

These computational methods can therefore help discern and formalise higher level patterns of cumulation and distribution. These overarching threads of cumulation and interrelation can provide grounds for flexibly structuring analyses around both core discursive domains involved in the processes of reformulation at the fin de siècle and how the interplay between these core domains are unfolded into localised and specific discursive configurations. Despite generic distinctions between the texts across these corpora, the Nietzsche corpus overlaps in significant ways with the other corpora of the

1870s-1910s corpus indicating key areas of discursive and cultural negotiation and exploration, and these relate to patterns of cumulation and interrelation as explored in the research literature on decadence in the 1920s-2010s corpora. These overarching patterns across the 1870s-1910s and 1920s-2010s corpora are not meant to be understood as one to one mappings between the different discursive patterns identified across the two overarching sets of corpora, but rather how overlaps and differences between these recurring semantic clusters can serve as comparative foils to develop lines of analysis, and to explore and identify productive new avenues of investigation. For example, rather than focussing on time and temporal self-consciousness, as suggested in the recurrent of semantic of time in both the 1870s-1910s and 1920s-2010s corpora, I chose to focus instead on the intriguing frequently recurrent semantics of physicality in the 1870s-1910s corpora that did not appear as prominently in the 1920s-2010s corpora. Tensions between collectivity and individuality at the intersections of self/world suggests the reformulations and renegotiations of notions of self and subjectivity, society and social life playing out at the fin de siècle. The analyses of the tensions between subjectivity or individuality and collectivity in relation to 1870s-1910s corpora in Chapter III suggest how these tensions can be unfolded and explored into different meaningful configurations — for example, as discussed above, in relation to notions of case and type (III-2-A), or in the ways in which meaning is substantiated, both in relation to the self and to art, through intersections between collectivity and individuality (the self becomes meaningful through intertextual webs of references, just as texts foreground their meaningful elaboration as processes of cumulation and interrelation of intertextual cultural repositories of references and resources). Tensions between exteriorities and interiorities as identified in relation the 1870s and the 1910s corpora therefore also relate to tensions between collectivity and

individuality as identified in the 1920s-2010s corpora in the way in which notions and experiences of self and selfhood are explored and made meaningful through communal resources and through processes of self-differentiation and self-reference with collectivity. The foregrounding of the dynamics of meaningful elaboration in creative processes relate to the self-consciousness of art as artistic practice as identified at the intersections of art/self/world. A variety of recursive strategies through the 1870s-1910s, analysed particularly in III-2-C, extend further the self-conscious exploration of the possibilities and limitations of different modes of artistic expression as processes of meaningful elaboration that are played out through the tensions between art and life as identified in the 1920s-2010s corpora.

This systemic, iterative and comparative analytical process, as discussed throughout this section, allows for the tracing and exploring of different patterns of repetition and variation, self-reference and self-differentiation, cumulation and interrelation at different scales and along different analytical lines across the corpora. It is a manageable and flexible framework for identifying and exploring different variations and configurations of recurrent and significant patterns of tension and interrelation. In this way, patterns that emerge from the computational reconfiguration and contrasting of texts related to decadence in 1870s-1910s and 1920s-2010s serve to both analytically formalise and empirically substantiate significant discursive tensions and intersections playing out across the corpora as well as explore alternative ways and perspectives through which these discursive patterns could be conceptualised by allowing to trace back to the plurality of configurations into which these tensions and interrelations are unfolded. The computational deformances of the corpora through word frequency lists and topic models therefore do not constitute analyses in themselves, but rather serve to complement and augment the analytical process.

Computational deformances can help to formalise and manage analyses of complex phenomena as well as explore new ways of seeing our texts and therefore open up new possibilities of interpretation. Furthermore, more concretely, in relation to this project in particular, the recurrent patterns of tension and interrelation identified and explored in these corpora of texts related to decadence highlight the productivity of conceptualising decadence in terms of processes of (re)signification and elaboration of meaning as theorised in the combination of systems theory, discourse theory and computational approaches to textual analyses. Patterns of cumulation and interrelation, self-differentiation and self-reference, repetition and variation as identified across the corpora suggests how decadence can be productively conceptualised as opening up discursive resources and strategies that play out processes of articulation and re-entry, dynamics of change, across fundamental domains of modern self-understanding and self-experience in the shifting cultural landscape of the *fin de siècle*. This approach therefore helps to conceptualise the semantic force of decadence as consisting in providing strategies and resources for destabilising, exposing and exploring the process of (re)signification, of elaboration of meaning.

Chapters I and II therefore set up the main thesis and premise of this research project, and unpack the approach developed throughout this project. In Chapter I, I identify and explore the different ways in which the fundamental ambiguity and liminality of decadence has been characterised particularly, how it is a notably widespread and diffuse concept at the *fin de siècle* (I-1), how it encompasses fundamental tensions and interrelates and straddles different cultural and analytical domains and scales (I-2), and how it is understood as a fundamentally liminal and slippery concept that is conceptualised as playing out dynamics of transition and change (I-3). I also explore in this chapter the ways in which critics have theorised,



analytically addressed and engaged with these aspects of decadent ambiguity and liminality. In particular, I highlight the approaches that conceptualise the fundamental ambiguity and liminality of decadence as constitutive of its particular meaningfulness and significance at the fin de siècle (I-4).

In Chapter II, I combine and rework the critical insights discussed in Chapter I into an original theoretical and methodological approach which explicitly, flexibly and productively addresses the ambiguity and liminality of decadence. In the first part of the chapter (II-1) I explore relevant theoretical resources from systems theory, and in particular from Luhmann's systems theory of (re)signification. In the second part of the chapter (II-2), I explore discursive and constructionist approaches to meaning and (re)signification. Finally, in the third part of the chapter (II-3), I discuss how computational approaches to textual analysis can complement and facilitate the implementation of the theoretical insights from systems theories and discourse theory as discussed in the first two parts of the chapter.

In Chapters III and IV, I explore more specifically how this approach, as sketched out in Chapter I and II, can be unfolded into analyses. In Chapter III, I focus on corpora of texts by Mann, Nietzsche, Söderberg and Strindberg written between the 1870s and the 1920s. In the first part of the chapter (III-1), I analyse recurrent semantic patterns of cumulation, tension and interrelation across the corpora with the help of word frequency lists and topic models. The semantic tensions between collectivity and individuality, physicality and inwardness, exteriority and interiority emerge as particularly striking and revealing patterns. These are unfolded further into more in-depth and fine-grain analyses in the second part of the chapter (III-2) in relation to *Tristan*, *Tonio Kröger* and *Der Tod in Venedig*, by Mann, *Der Fall Wagner* by Nietzsche, *Doktor Glas* by Söderberg and *I havsbandet* by Strindberg. In section

III-2-A, I explore tensions between individuality and collectivity in relation to how processes of self-reference and self-differentiation are unfolded around figures that hold together tensions between collectivity and individuality — particularly in relation to notions of case in *Der Fall Wagner* and type in *Tristan* and *Tonio Kröger*. Tensions between collectivity and individuality are further configured through experiments with compositional structures of repetition and variation that unfold on both intra- and inter-textual levels. In section III-2-B, tensions between collectivity and individuality intersect with tensions between interiority and exteriority, physicality and inwardness, in the analyses of the interplay between expressive and mimetic aesthetics explored in particular in relation to *Der Tod in Venedig*, *Doktor Glas* and *I havsbandet*. On the one hand, spaces and places, physical characteristics, and other protagonists, i.e. exteriorities, become mediations of the protagonists' interior mental states and processes. Yet on the other hand, the sense and experience of self and subjectivity is substantiated and “made real” through self-conscious processes of echoing and arranging intertextual resources and references. The self is only experienced and made meaningful through the assemblage of exterior cultural references. These self-conscious strategies that destabilise and explore processes of signification in relation to notions of self as well as notions of art are analysed further in the final section (III-2-C). Recursive strategies in *Tristan*, *Doktor Glas* and *I havsbandet* foreground processes of meaningful elaboration in relation to art and notions of self as contingent processes of construction. The self-conscious foregrounding of meaningful and creative processes as construction explores the possibilities and limitations of different modes of artistic expression as contingent processes of meaningful elaboration, as well as the limits and desirability of the knowability of the self.

In Chapter IV, I explore recurring discursive patterns in corpora of research literature on decadence and related concepts between the 1920s and 2010s. After an initial reminder on aspects of the corpus and analytical process (IV-1), the analyses in the second part of the chapter (IV-2), focus in particular on the Decadence corpora, and point to how decadence has been more or less latently discussed in terms of recurring semantic tensions and interrelations that explore and reformulate core aspects of modern self-understanding and self-experience. In particular, I discuss how recurrent tensions between decline and renewal, optimism and pessimism relate to a new sense of temporal self-consciousness and to shifts in the conceptualisation and experience of time at the fin de siècle (IV-2-A). In IV-2-B, I explore how tensions between individuality or subjectivity and collectivity unfold and explore different aspects in the reformulations of notions of self, subjectivity and collectivity and social life at the fin de siècle. Finally, in IV-2-C, tensions between art and life configure the self-consciousness of art as particular cultural practice for developing meaning and coherence. Reformulations of the role of art and the artist at this time explore the limits and possibilities of art as cultural practice for elaborating meaning, and as particular medium for understanding and exploring broader debates and aspects of subjective and collective life. The discussions throughout this section also relate these discursive patterns and tensions to analyses developed in Chapter III. In the third part of the chapter, IV-3, discursive patterns of the Decadence corpora, as discussed in the previous section (IV-2), are compared with discursive patterns of the Modernity, Fin de Siècle and Degeneration corpora. These analyses highlight significant patterns of self-differentiation and self-reference between these corpora such that the relation between decadence and these other concepts can be productively framed and formalised in terms of theories of (re)signification as discussed in Chapter II. Decadence can be understood as

functioning as the unmarked side of the distinction in the process of re-entry, or as the open field of discursivity in relation to these corpora. The analyses throughout these chapters therefore serve to concretise and detail further the approach to decadence developed throughout this thesis as opening up resources and strategies for playing out and exploring processes of (re)signification.



## Chapter I

### Decadence as Troubling Process

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to locate the research in this project within the field of research on decadence more broadly, and to situate the motivating questions underpinning this project in relation to the general state of the field of research on decadence.

The key thesis that underpins this project is that a recurrent issue in research on decadence is the fundamental ambiguity of the concept. Furthermore, I argue that the ambiguity, tension and liminality at the core of decadence is precisely what makes it a meaningful and significant concept at the fin de siècle. This ambiguity is constitutive of the meaningfulness and significance of decadence at the fin de siècle.

Consequently, the way in which this constitutive ambiguity is conceptualised, addressed and approached in research of decadence emerges as a decisive premise which fundamentally shapes the subsequent analyses of decadence. I therefore argue that the issue of how to theoretically and methodologically conceptualise and manage this ambiguity constitutes a fundamental and decisive premise to research on decadence. There is a need in research on decadence for theoretical and methodological approaches that productively, flexibly and explicitly address the fundamental ambiguity, liminality and tension at the core of decadence.

As will emerge from the discussions throughout Chapter I, most researchers recognise and acknowledge the ambiguity and instability of the concept — whether considered and approached constructively and productively or dismissively and reductively, decadence is recurrently understood as ambiguous, unstable and liminal. Yet few researchers incorporate these insights into an overarching productive, flexible and explicit theoretical and methodological approach. The purpose of Chapters I and II is to discuss the critical insights from research on the fundamental ambiguity and liminality of decadence and critically rework and combine these insights into an innovative theoretical and methodological practice which would contribute to stimulating further research and alternative perspectives on decadence specifically, and on the interrelations between language, literature and culture at the fin de siècle more broadly.

In this first chapter, I will therefore be exploring the ways in which decadence can be understood to be constitutively ambiguous and liminality, and how researchers have analytically addressed and engaged with the fundamental ambiguity of the concept.

In the first section of this chapter (I-1), I discuss the recurrent foregrounding of issues of meaning and significance in relation to decadence at the fin de siècle, and how this ambiguity is partly linked to the notable diffuseness and suggestiveness of the concept at the time. Approaches to this particular diffuseness and suggestiveness can range from radically contextualised approaches, approaches that compile lists of recurrent features to develop a sense of the characteristics of literary decadence despite its vagueness, methodologies that, on the contrary, advocate a functional and strategic rather than substantive approach to address the diffuseness and

suggestiveness of decadence, and finally discourse approaches have also been put forward as a means to address the diffuse polysemy of decadence at the fin de siècle.

In the second section of this chapter (I-2), I discuss a further way in which decadence has been conceptualised as particularly ambiguous at the fin de siècle. A semantic shift or turn in relation to decadence at the fin de siècle destabilises the meaning of the concept such that it becomes conceptualised in terms of fundamental tensions between a provocative, contestatory stance and a cultural critical stance. As an extension to this, decadence becomes conceptualised as fundamentally straddling and interrelating different cultural domains — it functions both on a particularly localised level, as well as across broad domains of fin de siècle cultural and social discussions. To manage these tensions, decadence becomes structured around sets of dichotomised which fragment and separate out different strands and aspects of meaning.

In the third section of this chapter (I-3), I discuss how approaches that frame decadence in terms of theories of history and time offer an alternative approach that does not necessarily separate but rather holds together these structural tensions by conceptualising decadent ambiguity as liminality. In this approach, decadence becomes understood as an unstable concept that facilitates and plays out dynamics of change.

In the final section of this chapter (I-4), I return to the initial premise discussed in I-1 that posited the ambiguity and liminality of decadence as primarily an issue of meaning, signification and significance. In I-4, I therefore argue how insights from theories of time and change can be incorporated and translated into theories of meaning and signification by exploring approaches that conceive of the fundamental



ambiguity and liminality of decadence as constitutive of its meaningfulness at the fin de siècle.

## **I - 1 - The Trouble with Decadence: Issues of Meaning, Decadence as Diffuse and Suggestive Concept**

In this section I discuss how a central issue that runs through research on decadence at the European fin de siècle relates to the significance and meaning of the term.

These debates revolve around a certain tension between the prevalence, significance and yet fundamental elusiveness and ambiguity of decadence. Its pervasiveness at the time makes it both emerge as highly significant, yet also diffuse, fragmented and empty. This therefore constitutes a fundamental initial dilemma in the study of decadence at the fin de siècle.

In research on decadence, scholars recurrently flag up issues of meaning.<sup>1</sup>

Anderson, for example, declares decadence a “difficult and controversial notion.”<sup>2</sup>

Studies on decadence are often introduced with reflections on issues of meaning and definition, such as Andersen who prefaces his literary analyses of decadence in the Scandinavian context with a chapter exploring decadence as a concept and tracing its understanding and conceptualisation across different research traditions.<sup>3</sup> Genealogical

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<sup>1</sup> cf. e.g. Claes Ahlund, ‘Per Thomas Andersen: Dekadanse i Nordisk Litteratur 1880-1900. Recension’, *Samlaren. Tidskrift För Svensk Litteraturvetenskaplig Forskning.*, 116 (1995), 170–71 (p. 170); Per Thomas Andersen, p. 49; Bauer, pp. 69–70; Gilman, p. 35; Kafitz, *Décadence.*, p. 165; Kafitz, *Dekadenz.*, p. 20; Koskimies, p. 8; Krobb, p. 548; Potolsky, ‘Introduction’, p. vi.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Anderson, ‘Die Literarische Décadence Um 1900 by Wolfdietrich Rasch. Review’, *MLN*, German Issue, 103.3 (1988), 692–94 (p. 692).

<sup>3</sup> Per Thomas Andersen, pp. 49–133.

studies of decadence, such as Gilman's *Decadence: The Strange Life of an Epithet* (1979), are entirely dedicated to exploring and tracing the shifting meanings of the term. As a vague and unstable concept, decadence is difficult to grasp and to use as grounding for analyses, for example, Koskimies notes: "Gerade die Benennung Dekadenz gehört zu den begrifflich unfertigsten"<sup>4</sup> (The very term decadence belongs to the conceptually unfinished).<sup>5</sup> Krobb also considers how decadence was an ambiguous concept at the turn of the century, and remains problematic as it became a concept in scholarly discourse: "A contested, polemical, imprecise concept has been adapted as an analytical tool in scholarly discourse."<sup>6</sup>

The vagueness and instability of the concept is often linked to its remarkable prevalence and widespread use at the fin de siècle. The increased currency of the term at the fin de siècle does not signal that the meaning of decadence became more stabilised at the time. On the contrary, Gilman argues that the nineteenth century is when the meaning of decadence is at its most diffuse and opaque.<sup>7</sup> Krobb notes the prevalence of decadence in public discourse by 1892 in Germany despite it only recently having been introduced in the German vocabulary — he characterises it as "a *fashionable* term in cultural criticism and public discourse."<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Bauer notes the popularity and fashionability of the term, the "‘vogue’ du mot décadence" ("popularity" of the word decadence) at the fin de siècle.<sup>9</sup> Kafitz also identifies how, around the 1880s, decadence was a "Schlagwort" (catchword) and "Modebegriff" (fashionable

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<sup>4</sup> Koskimies, p. 112.

<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all translations my own.

<sup>6</sup> Krobb, p. 548.

<sup>7</sup> Gilman, p. 35.

<sup>8</sup> Krobb, pp. 547–48 emphasis added.

<sup>9</sup> Bauer, p. 69.

concept) widespread across Europe.<sup>10</sup> In *Décadence in Deutschland*, Kafitz traces the appearances of the term in bibliographical publications indexing information from and recurring themes in German-language publications. He notes that between 1893 and 1906 the word “décadence” is listed as recurrent across publications (except in the years 1894 and 1901 where it is not listed, and between 1899 and 1906 the word “Dekadenz” rather than “décadence” is listed).<sup>11</sup>

The recurrent characterisation of the term’s notable prevalence as “fashion” and “fashionable” suggests how scholars are torn between dismissing the term as too diffuse to be substantially meaningful and recognising that this widespread use signals a particular significance and relevance. Potolsky notes that the nineteenth century was the time of “great dissemination” for decadence, and that it was “a concept that was widely influential in the nineteenth century.”<sup>12</sup> Krobb also recognises that the prevalence of the concept at the time goes hand in hand with indicating some kind of widespread significance:

the contemporary use of the term, ironic or otherwise, must have been quite widespread, as there must have been in the period under discussion, the last decade of the nineteenth century, some shared perception that their own time was one of stagnation or even decline, or whatever else the word was seen as denoting.<sup>13</sup>

Yet Krobb also suggests that despite this significance, the term as analytical concept is too widespread to be useful and meaningful: “the use of the term ‘decadence’ as an analytical concept and a label for a certain period in cultural history has become

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<sup>10</sup> Kafitz, *Dekadenz*, p. 20.

<sup>11</sup> Kafitz, *Décadence*, p. 149.

<sup>12</sup> Potolsky, ‘Introduction’, p. vi.

<sup>13</sup> Krobb, p. 548.

inflationary and has thus, probably, lost some of its force.”<sup>14</sup> Koskimies, moreover, suggests that there was an initial clarity and substance to the term that has become diluted as it has travelled from its original context in France across other European contexts. Yet in the same breath, he also seems to recognise that the “original” meaning was already rather varied and protean:

Offenbar hat jede Nationalliteratur dem Begriffskreis so viel Eigenes hinzugefügt, dass die ursprüngliche Klarheit zum Teil geschwunden oder wenigstens merklich getrübt ist. Das ist um so offensichtlicher schon deshalb, weil die Theorie der französischen Dekadenz recht zahlreiche Elemente enthält, weil sozusagen ihre chemische Zusammensetzung recht vielseitig ist.<sup>15</sup>

(Apparently, every national literature has added so much to the conceptual circle that the original clarity has partially disappeared or at least noticeably clouded. This is all the more obvious because the theory of French decadence contains quite a number of elements, because, so to speak, its chemical composition is already rather varied.)

Decadence could not, therefore, have become so varied and shifting in meaning if it did not in some way already invite and accommodate a plurality of meanings and a certain polysemy. But this dispersal in meaning, rather than rendering the concept particularly significant, is instead understood as depleting the meaningfulness of the word.

According to Koskimies: “Das Wort ist, wie gesagt, ein blosser *topos*, ein gewohnheitsmässiges Klischee”<sup>16</sup> (The word is, as mentioned earlier, a mere *topos*, a conventional cliché). This idea of cliché, of decadence as ready-made formula or mere fashionable trend, highlights this dissonance and irresolution between reconciling the prevalence and plurality of the term with significance and meaningfulness. The

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<sup>14</sup> Krobb, p. 548.

<sup>15</sup> Koskimies, p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Koskimies, p. 115 italics in original.

diffuseness of the term, and the variability and plurality of meaning that it generates therefore recurs as problematic for researchers, both in terms of understanding and assessing the significance of the concept at the time, and in deploying the concept as a term of critical analysis. Because of its widespread use and popularity, the concept remains unstable and difficult to pin down, and this tension between significance and meaningfulness and diffuseness and variability creates a dilemma for researchers.

The concept of decadence accommodates an array of different meanings which feeds into the instability and ambiguity of the concept at the time, and it has been argued that this elusiveness is generated by the concept being more suggestive than substantive. The understanding of decadence as lacking meaning is often related to the conceptualisation that this elusiveness, this radical polysemy, is enabled by the concept being more suggestive than substantive and therefore lacking any definable and substantial meaningfulness. The term is so widespread and varied that it seems it could be applied to everything and nothing.<sup>17</sup> Decadence is so widely and variably used that it becomes an empty word, a mere sign that can be filled with an array of different and conflicting meanings. De Palacio describes decadence as first a word and then a thing<sup>18</sup> — appealing primarily to the (cultural) imaginary it carries heavy evocative charges and connotations and uses these discursive and semantic connotations as resources in the process of signification. Bauer speaks of the “l’aura’ quasi magique” (the quasi magical ‘aura’) emanating from the word — an aura that is evocative and suggestive, but at the same therefore risks to “perdre toute vertu descriptive et ordinatrice” (lose all descriptive and categorising virtues).<sup>19</sup> Bauer also emphasises that

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<sup>17</sup> de Palacio, p. 23.

<sup>18</sup> de Palacio, p. 16.

<sup>19</sup> Bauer, p. 69.

the particular significance of decadence lies in these suggestive capacities:

“décadence [...] doit [...] son durable et douteux prestige à un [...] pouvoir suggestif”

(decadence [...] owes [...] its lasting and doubtful prestige to a [...] power of suggestion).<sup>20</sup> The ambiguity of the term is therefore understood in terms of its particularly suggestive capacities that generate connotative rather than descriptive value (another reason that would render it not particularly useful as critical and analytical term). Bernheimer highlights how Gilman’s interpretation of decadence foregrounds the word as suggestive rather than substantive: decadence “has no objective existence,” it is “a poetic metaphor that replaces the factually real with wish-fulfilling illusions about the way the world moves and means.”<sup>21</sup> In his interpretation, Gilman understands the term’s suggestiveness and instability as deceptive and misleading rather than meaningful.<sup>22</sup> The suggestiveness and diffuseness of the term at the fin de siècle is therefore often configured as a hindrance to deploying it in critical analyses which leads scholars to dismiss the validity, significance and meaningfulness of the term at the fin de siècle.

The ambiguity of decadence can therefore be related to the diffuse character of the word at the fin de siècle. It is remarkably pervasive at this time which renders it both particularly significant and yet difficult to pin down. Decadence therefore emerges as persistently problematic, and yet remains a key and significant concept of broad cultural and social relevance at the time. There is a tension between dismissing the word and its related practices as empty and unsubstantiated trends and fashions, and recognising that this instability could point to a particular meaningfulness: “the difficulty

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<sup>20</sup> Bauer, p. 69.

<sup>21</sup> Bernheimer, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> Gilman, p. 50; Bernheimer, p. 5.

of coming to a singular definition of decadence can be taken as evidence of the word's problematic flexibility, but also of its conceptual suggestiveness for intellectuals of every political and aesthetic stripe."<sup>23</sup> Decadence enables the possibility of expressing a spectrum of different and contradictory meanings, which has often led scholars to argue for a highly contextualised approach of fine-grain engagement and close reading. Andersen for example argues that "[d]ekadansebegrepet er imidlertid ikke noe entydig begrep. Det blir brukt i ulike sammenhenger og med mange forskjellige hensikter, noe som fører til at konteksten bestandig er svært viktig for forståelsen av meningsinnholdet" ([t]he decadence concept is however not a clear concept. It is used in different contexts and with many different purposes, which means that the context is always very important for understanding the meaning of the content).<sup>24</sup>

A related way in which scholars approach this diffuse instability of decadence is by relying on close readings (or general expertise in the subject and previous research on decadent literature) in order to develop lists of features that recur across literary texts related to decadence thereby elaborating an array of recurrent characteristics, themes, motifs and styles that would characterise the decadent aesthetic.<sup>25</sup> Decadence becomes understood as the arrangement and configuration of a repertoire of motifs into different constellations, as encompassing a broad array of different characteristics that can be arranged into a number of different configurations of literary decadence: "[v]ersucht man die bisher genannten Aspekte der Dekadenz zusammenzufassen, ergibt sich, daß das dekadente Lebensgefühl in einer Vielzahl von Motiven in

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<sup>23</sup> Potolsky, 'Introduction', p. vi.

<sup>24</sup> Per Thomas Andersen, p. 49.

<sup>25</sup> cf. e.g. Geddes, 'Swedish Fin-de-Siècle: Hjalmar Söderberg (1869-1941)', pp. 109–10; Gilman, p. 11; Kafitz, *Dekadenz*, pp. 10–15; Krobb, p. 549; Potolsky, 'Introduction', p. v; Schoolfield, p. xiii.

Erscheinung treten kann”<sup>26</sup> ([i]f one seeks to summarise the aspects of decadence mentioned so far, it becomes apparent that the decadent attitude to life can manifest itself in a wide variety of motifs). Kafitz, for example, develops a repertoire of motifs drawing on Hermann Bahr and Erwin Koppen’s own compilations of decadent features.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Krobb enumerates a number of features related to decadence:

In the early public debates about decadence, the target was everything that seemed aesthetically extravagant, abnormal, out of the ordinary: the new departures in modern literature, its morbid and erotically unconventional leanings, its intellectuality, its disregard of everything natural, and its cult of the artificial, the effeminate, the individualistic or monadic, the mystical or perverse.<sup>28</sup>

Crucially, both Krobb and Kafitz identify a similar set of recurring motifs (the occult, spiritual, mystical; cerebral subjectivity and individualism; the cult of artificiality), and they bring together their set of disparate motifs around the core conceptualisation of decadence as transgression and protest. In this way, a multifaceted repertoire of decadent motifs becomes articulated around a single unifying element, an single underlying purpose and strategy, namely, the revolt against bourgeois normalcy and modernity: “Sie [all the characteristics] alle enthalten eine polemische Wendung gegen konventionelle Wahrnehmungs- und Erlebnisformen”<sup>29</sup> (they [all the characteristics] all convey a polemical turn against conventional forms of understanding and of experience).

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<sup>26</sup> Kafitz, *Dekadenz.*, p. 20.

<sup>27</sup> Kafitz, *Dekadenz.*, pp. 10–15.

<sup>28</sup> Krobb, p. 549.

<sup>29</sup> Kafitz, *Dekadenz.*, p. 21.



Similarly, Potolsky suggests decadence can be approached in terms of a recurring set of features, “a recognisable (albeit shifting) constellation of ideas and metaphors, from the imagery of imperial Rome and the femme fatale, to sensual indulgence, philosophical pessimism, and sexual nonconformity.”<sup>30</sup> And in a similar move to Kafitz and Krobb, Potolsky articulates these disparate features around a unifying underpinning purpose:

the concept of decadence could *figure a striking array of changes*, from the decline of bodily health and the loss of social cohesion to the increasing linguistic complexity of modern poetry. Each kind of decadent change could seemingly serve as a metaphor for any other.<sup>31</sup>

In Potolsky, decadence becomes understood as a repertoire of different motifs that can articulate different notions of change — it is a resource that opens up towards an array of semantic resources and motifs for figuring change. He emphasises the suggestiveness of decadence, and how this can be understood as a resource for enabling the realisation of a number of different configurations: “The notion is so adaptable, so open to contradictory appropriations, that it seems more a cluster of metaphors and allusions than a unified political or philosophical position.”<sup>32</sup> Potolsky further emphasises how this suggestiveness and the creative possibilities of the decadent repertoire are linked to how it encourages the interrelation and intermingling of different cultural domains: “Decadent writing encouraged such crossings of organic, literary, psychological and political metaphors for change.”<sup>33</sup> Whilst Potolsky on the one

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<sup>30</sup> Potolsky, ‘Introduction’, p. v.

<sup>31</sup> Potolsky, ‘Introduction’, p. vi emphasis added.

<sup>32</sup> Potolsky, ‘Introduction’, p. vi.

<sup>33</sup> Potolsky, ‘Introduction’, p. vi.

hand, and Krobb and Kafitz on the other, emphasise different unifying ideas around which decadent features coalesce (the configuration of change or the exploding modern bourgeois normalcy and complacency respectively) both imply a conceptualisation of decadence as a repertoire of suggestive motifs spanning a number of different cultural spheres that intersect into a variety of different arrangements, as a set of resources that stimulate the possibility of a variety of different creative arrangements. Decadence therefore appears as participating in a logic of diversity (opening up towards a multiplicity of resources and meaningful possibilities) rather than in a logic of absolute difference or opposition.<sup>34</sup>

A number of revealing insights can be drawn from these reflections. As noted earlier, the particular polysemy of decadence has lead researchers to emphasise close readings of and fine-grain engagement with particular instances of decadent configuration, and the practice of compiling lists of recurring features to characterise decadence based on close readings does initially seem to follow this emphasis on close reading as productive approach. Yet, the practice of compiling lists of recurring features across texts also suggests how this is a methodology that strives to balance contextualised specificity of instances with abstracting and interpreting higher-level patterns, broader patterns of repetition and variation, of regularity and dispersion, across texts related to decadence. Elaborating lists of recurring motifs (and basing analyses in relation to these lists) can therefore be understood as drawing on cumulative approaches to decadence which emphasise the importance of considering the repetition and differentiation across a number of different instances related to

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<sup>34</sup> Barbara Spackman, 'Interversions', in *Perennial Decay: On the Aesthetics and Politics of Decadence*, ed. by Liz Constable, Dennis Denisoff, and Matthew Potolsky (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 35–49 (p. 42).

decadence rather than focussing on single instances. Furthermore, the conceptualisation of decadence as an array of different resources that can be realised in a number of different configurations emphasises both the repertoire of possibilities or resources and their realisation into particular configuration and arrangements. The link between the repertoire of suggestive resources and their realisation in particular configuration is the process of figuration, the process of signification. Often the emphasis is either on the repertoire or the particular instantiations, but sometimes, as in Potolsky above, there is a hint towards how the particular *processes* of configuration (combining repertoire and arrangements) may be what contributes to the particular significance and meaningfulness of decadence. This would therefore hold together and articulate the suggestiveness of the concept (how it opens up a plurality of resources) and the plurality of instances, the diffuseness of the concept, by highlighting the processes of signification the concept enables. Focussing too readily on a more or less narrow set of particular motifs that would be constitutive of decadence overlooks the processes of configuration, the ways in which these resources are configured into a variety of different arrangements.

This points towards a further approach to the diffuse ambiguity of decadence which positions itself in opposition to these substantive approaches of compiling features. This is the approach as suggested in Constable et al., *Perennial decay: On the Aesthetics and Politics of Decadence* (1999). Here, rather than a referential and substantive approach, a functional approach to decadence is favoured in which the “strategies” of decadence are analysed so as to avoid the pitfall of merely

“characterising” it.<sup>35</sup> In this theoretical outlook, decadence is understood as “more than the collection of themes, tropes, and stock characters that critics have largely focussed upon”<sup>36</sup> since focussing on the recurring motifs of decadence has led to a confusion between the resources decadence draws on and how decadence should be conceptualised:

decadent writing is no more ‘decadent’ than realist writing is ‘real’. Only when critics begin to recognise the consequences of this insight and examine the *uses* of decadence, rather than its *meaning*, can critical discussions of the topic move beyond assumptions (often unwittingly) inherited from Nordau.<sup>37</sup>

This functional perspective seeks to develop into an explicit theoretical and methodological approach to decadence the insight that “im Décadence-Diskurs der 1890er Jahre Aspekte des Form und nicht des Inhalts dominieren”<sup>38</sup> (aspects of form and not content dominate in the *décadence* discourse of the 1890s). If decadence is a particularly diffuse and suggestive term, then one way of analytically addressing this elusiveness is to approach it in terms of the strategies and processes that it enables and plays out rather than the themes and motifs it draws on. In this way, the concept of decadence is strategically emptied out of substance in order to identify how it may function and the role it may play as strategy. Constable et al. argue that decadence has been overwhelmingly approached in terms of substance,<sup>39</sup> and that focussing too strongly on the “thematic universe of decadent writing (the familiar constellation of

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<sup>35</sup> Liz Constable, Potolsky, Matthew, and Dennis Denisoff, ‘Introduction’, in *Perennial Decay: On the Aesthetics and Politics of Decadence*, ed. by Liz Constable, Dennis Denisoff, and Matthew Potolsky (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 1–34 (p. 11).

<sup>36</sup> Constable, Potolsky, Matthew, and Denisoff, p. 11.

<sup>37</sup> Constable, Potolsky, Matthew, and Denisoff, pp. 11–12 emphasis in original.

<sup>38</sup> Sørensen, p. 426.

<sup>39</sup> Constable, Potolsky, Matthew, and Denisoff, p. 3.

perversion, artificialities, illnesses and blasphemies)” has distracted research from the “potentially destabilising effect of that writing itself.”<sup>40</sup> The difficulties of grasping and deploying decadence analytically, instead of pointing towards its lack of meaning and significance, is rather indication of precisely that which constitutes the meaningfulness of decadence — the process of destabilisation and reconfiguration that decadence enables. Problems with substantive approaches become particularly acute when linguistic and literary configurations come to be understood as transparent, as transparently reflecting an existing reality, rather than as a particular configuration of a particular reality thereby confusion the process of mediation with what is mediated.<sup>41</sup> As Constable argues, therefore, the danger of substantive approaches is the confusion of substance as transparent reality which overlooks the strategies of exploration and destabilisation that perform self-conscious subversive processes of textual destabilisation.<sup>42</sup> Decadence as strategy destabilises straightforward mimetic assumptions themselves. As Weir argues, in line with Pierrot, decadence could be pinpointed as the “line of cleavage between the classical aesthetic and the modern aesthetic” in the way that it challenges mimetic assumptions as underpinning artistic creation.<sup>43</sup> There is a certain textual self-consciousness at work in decadence (as will be explored further in close readings in Chapter III-2-B and III-2-C), which destabilises straightforward mimetic assumptions, assumptions of transparency, between representation and the reality to which it relates. Therefore, “decadence requires a criticism receptive not merely to its themes and styles but also to its particular textual

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<sup>40</sup> Constable, Potolsky, Matthew, and Denisoff, p. 11.

<sup>41</sup> Constable, Potolsky, Matthew, and Denisoff, pp. 16–17.

<sup>42</sup> Constable, Potolsky, Matthew, and Denisoff, p. 11.

<sup>43</sup> David Weir, *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), p. 8.

means, strategies and procedures.”<sup>44</sup> The strict focus on strategy and functionality in contradiction to substantive approaches, however, overlooks how the compiling of recurrent features can already itself explore how decadence functions as strategy of signification (as discussed above). A discursive approach, as will be discussed later on in this section and further in Chapter II, can help reconcile both the cumulative approach of recurring and differentiating motifs with approaches that emphasise the function of decadence as enabling processes of destabilisation and reconfiguration.

Similarly to Constable et al., Bauer argues that an issue in research on decadence is how it no longer recognises decadence for what it initially was namely, literary “games” (“des ‘jeux’ littéraires”), rather decadence is understood “comme des ‘reflets’ immédiats d’une ‘décadence’ réelle”<sup>45</sup> (as immediate reflections of a real “decadence”). Therefore, much of the confusion around decadence stems from issues of theorisation, from issues of how decadence is conceptualised and understood, as transparent, as if describing a reality, rather than as framing and configuring a reality through strategies or language “games.” In functional approaches, the point is not whether decadence, either as motif or reality, can be substantively defined, but rather to analyse what particular processes or strategies of destabilisation, exploration and configuration the decadent aesthetic enables. Bauer therefore argues for a structuralist and systemic approach to decadence. Bauer conceptualises decadence as “un ‘thème’ littéraire (plus exactement un ‘ensemble’ ou ‘système’ de thèmes littéraires)”<sup>46</sup> (a literary “theme” (more precisely a “collection” or “system” of literary themes)). In other words, decadence is a systemic repertoire of suggestive resources and motifs.

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<sup>44</sup> Constable, Potolsky, Matthew, and Denisoff, p. 11.

<sup>45</sup> Bauer, p. 69.

<sup>46</sup> Bauer, p. 70 emphasis added.

Furthermore, Bauer argues that the playing out of these literary resources, the different possibilities of configuration and arrangements that these resources enable are what constitute the particular widespread significance of decadence at the fin de siècle.<sup>47</sup> In order to understand the significance of decadence at the fin de siècle, therefore, researchers must conceptualise decadence in terms of the systemic role and function it plays as stimulating a broad array of configurations and arrangements.<sup>48</sup> Bauer suggests a structuralist approach to exploring decadence as function and strategy since a structuralist approach would enable not only to explore the particularities of decadent aesthetic itself, but also the particular place, function and significance of decadence as literary system of signs within broader cultural contexts thereby also providing ways to explore how it interrelates with broader cultural contexts.<sup>49</sup> Bauer therefore points here to a further aspect of the fundamental ambiguity of decadence that will be developed in more detail in the following section namely, how decadence interrelates different cultural domains and spheres, and the analytical difficulties in theoretically and methodologically reconciling and articulating the intersections and interrelations between these different domains.

Kafitz adopts a discourse analytical approach in *Décadence in Deutschland* (2004). A discursive approach could also provide valuable theoretical resources for conceptualising the interrelations between the literary and other cultural domains (as will be discussed further in Chapter II). However Kafitz is mainly drawn to the discursive approach as a way of approaching and managing the profusion of statements related to decadence, the diffuseness of decadence at the fin de siècle:

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<sup>47</sup> Bauer, p. 70.

<sup>48</sup> Bauer, p. 70.

<sup>49</sup> Bauer, p. 71.

“Entscheidend für die Ermittlung des Décadence-Diskurses ist nicht die Einzelaussage, sondern *die Addition oder Kombination von Aussagen*”<sup>50</sup> (What is decisive for the investigation of the *décadence* discourse is not the single statement, but *the addition or combination of statements*). Kafitz seems to be arguing for a cumulative approach to decadence as discourse. However, in *Décadence in Deutschland* the discursive approach is deployed purely instrumentally as a method of analysis, and the analytical possibilities of theorising decadence as discourse are not developed. Decadence is not theorised in terms of discourse in *Décadence in Deutschland*. In his analyses Kafitz focusses on the occurrence and recurrence of the word “*décadence*”: “Unter Décadence-Diskurs wird im folgenden der Gebrauch des Wortes *Décadence* in Zeitschriftenartikeln und Monographien der Jahre 1890 bis 1914 verstanden”<sup>51</sup> (In what follows, *décadence* discourse is understood as the use of the word *décadence* in journal articles and monographs from the years 1890 to 1914). Decadence is therefore analytically understood transparently as the occurrence of the sign “*décadence*” and not theorised in terms of discourse. This therefore overlooks the instances where strategies and processes that relate to decadence could be put into play without necessarily referring to the word directly. This approach, the tracing of all occurrences of the particular sign, may therefore skew his analyses towards a particular interpretation of decadence, rather than developing an overall picture of how decadence functions and signifies in terms of discourse.

An initial dilemma in research on decadence emerges in terms of how to analytically manage the profusion of conflicting statements related to decadence. One way to address this is to stimulate a shift in analytical perspective through processes of

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<sup>50</sup> Kafitz, *Décadence*., p. 282 emphasis added.

<sup>51</sup> Kafitz, *Décadence*., p. 149.



abstraction (similar to the functional approaches discussed above), specifically, in this case, by analysing cumulative patterns of discourse in order to explore higher-level insights rather than drown in the details. Kafitz, however, does not theorise decadence as discourse, but traces the occurrences of the word “*décadence*” across a broad corpus drawn from the contemporary German periodical press. He becomes overwhelmed with the number of instances, and does not have a theoretical model to discursively conceptualise and group these instances together. Rather than suggesting a different perspective on decadence he instead highlights the issue of diffusion and ambiguity: “Vielmehr gilt es, einen Eindruck von dem Gewimmel des Aussagefeldes zu vermitteln, das die Schwierigkeit, wenn nicht Unmöglichkeit einer Profilierung des *Décadence*-Begriffs zu demonstrieren vermag”<sup>52</sup> (It is instead more about conveying an impression of the teemingness of the field of statements which demonstrates the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of being able to profile the concept of decadence). Although Kafitz does point towards the value of theorising the profusion of statements in terms of discourse (drawing on notions of cumulation) he does not put these insights into practice (i.e. link notions of cumulation to notions of configuration — as discussed above — and articulate a comprehensive theoretical and methodological approach). In this project, the aim is to theorise decadence discursively, and this discursive perspective brings to light how decadence functions by opening up discursive resources and strategies that facilitate processes of (re)signification. The compiling of recurring features and the highlighting of how decadence provides an array and repository of images, motifs and themes that can be understood as creative resources can productively be translated in terms of Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory as

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<sup>52</sup> Kafitz, *Décadence*., p. 165.

decadence providing discursive resources (opening up the field of discursivity) in the process of articulation of different discursive configurations (this will be discussed in the following Chapter II). Discourse approaches are also systemic and provide means of conceptualising the intersection and interrelation of different discursive domains, a feature that is also relevant to decadence (as suggested by Potolsky above and which will be discussed further below). Discourse approaches also provide a particular theorisation of culture and meaning in terms of functional and cumulative processes of articulation and configurations. Whilst highlighting the usefulness of discursive approaches, Kafitz traces decadence substantively through his analyses of decadence, and falls back onto a theorisation of decadence as previously developed in his previous work *Dekadenz in Deutschland* (1987)— namely a dichotomising approach to decadence, as will be discussed in the following part of this chapter.

## **I - 2 - Decadence as Crisis Concept: Fundamental Tensions and Discursive Interrelations**

This section develops further certain aspects introduced in the previous section. The particular ambiguity and instability of decadence at the fin de siècle is related here to how decadence interrelates different cultural domains spheres across different cultural contexts. This entails analytical difficulties in how to approach and manage this fundamental tension and interrelation of decadence. A recurring strategy is to dichotomise and delineate different aspects and strands of meaning of decadence in order to make the term more analytically manageable. Analyses of decadence

therefore often become organised around notions of fundamental tensions and sets of dichotomies and dualities.

In the previous part of this chapter, I discuss how decadence has recurrently been identified as a widespread concept at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>53</sup> This particular prevalence and ambiguity of decadence at the fin de siècle is recurrently linked to the shifts taking place in the broader cultural context at the time. As discussed in the Introduction, the European fin de siècle is widely conceptualised as a time of crisis where fundamental aspects of social and cultural institutions and organisation are destabilised and transformed. Scobbie and Thompson, for example, detail the breakdown of previous conventions and institutions that upheld the social fabric and meaningfulness of life in general (for example they cite the institution of marriage, gender relations, notions of respectability threatened by exposure of hypocrisy and corruption in respectable society).<sup>54</sup> The fin de siècle crisis was pervasive in that it affected nearly all areas of cultural life, and the profound destabilisations of foundational institutions and values entailed a certain self-conscious questioning which affected not only the way in which lives were led, but also the very conceptualisation of the nature and meaning of life and subjectivity. Geddes, for example, describes how:

Shared beliefs and an acceptance of tradition gradually gave way to a questioning of all values and a sense of radical reappraisal of the human condition. The new critical awareness expressed itself in one direction in demands for social reform, in a desire to improve the external conditions of life. But at the same time such a fundamental rejection of the past brought with it a malaise going beyond the social or the psychological into the realms of philosophical enquiry. Lack of certainty and accepted beliefs led to

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<sup>53</sup> cf. e.g. Bauer, p. 69; Kafitz, *Dekadenz.*, p. 20; Kafitz, *Décadence.*, p. 149; Krobb, pp. 547–48, 553; Potolsky, 'Introduction', p. vi.

<sup>54</sup> Scobbie and Thompson, pp. 14–16.

an inner search, to a need to find ultimate truths which society and religion could no longer provide.<sup>55</sup>

The fin de siècle is therefore not only self-consciously transformative, it is also profoundly conflicted and ambivalent. The transformative process, by destabilising and questioning previous certainties, opened up a sense of uncertainty and disorientation which was profoundly conflictual, experienced as both liberation and anxiety. This is a time in which optimism and pessimism, a sense of failure, decline and progress turbulently coexist.<sup>56</sup> Krobb also notes the ambivalent tensions that characterise the fin de siècle. He contrasts the impressive advances in science and medicine with the profound experience of disillusionment at large.<sup>57</sup> In particular, he pinpoints the destabilisation of the notion of and the experience of the self and selfhood as “the pinnacle of this loss of former certainties.”<sup>58</sup> These tensions and dissolutions lead Krobb to character the fin de siècle as a moment of profound instability: “For every movement, there was a countermovement; for every orientation, alternatives sprang up.”<sup>59</sup>

Decadence is recurrently linked to this profound sense of crisis, and is usually conceptualised as a (more or less transparent) mediation of the sense of crisis. Krobb, for example, argues that the “discourse on decadence amounted to an expression of the sense of crisis that pervaded society that time.”<sup>60</sup> The dissolution of certainties and the conflicting tensions that constitute the fin de siècle are reflected in decadence as

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<sup>55</sup> Geddes, ‘Swedish Fin-de-Siècle: Hjalmar Söderberg (1869-1941)’, pp. 108–9.

<sup>56</sup> Scobbie and Thompson, p. 12.

<sup>57</sup> Krobb, p. 550.

<sup>58</sup> Krobb, p. 550.

<sup>59</sup> Krobb, p. 550.

<sup>60</sup> Krobb, p. 549.

the “art of the discarded certainty and the demolished wholeness.”<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, just as the crisis of the fin de siècle spread across all areas of cultural practice, so did decadence interrelate and spread across different cultural spheres: “The debates on decadence permeated all quarters of society and all ideological persuasions.”<sup>62</sup> Andersen also ties decadence at the nineteenth century to the sense of crisis that he configures as a metaphysical crisis in relation to the loss of certainties and values that supported and underpinned cultural and social institutions.<sup>63</sup> He also emphasise how decadence interrelates different cultural domains and levels of understanding. In particular, he identifies how in decadence terms of socio-cultural historical critique transfer between the individual level and the historical level in the way in which developmental arcs of empires and civilisations are based on anthropomorphised life cycles which permit metaphorical transfers and impositions from individual to collective histories. Also, in the other direction, individual deviances and pathologies could be magnified to be representative of a broad social and cultural decline: “Historiens gang og kulturenes forløp ble altså på flere måter sammenliknet med det individuelle menneskets livsløp. Menneskets livsløp ble en metafor for tiden og historien”<sup>64</sup> (The course of history and the course of culture thus became in many ways compared to the individual's life cycle. The human life cycle was a metaphor for the time and history). Bauer also emphasises the sense of instability of the fin de siècle, and the sense of anxiety in the face of the dissolution of core stable values at the heart of social life.<sup>65</sup> Similarly to Andersen, Bauer notes how decadence interrelates different culture

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<sup>61</sup> Krobb, p. 550.

<sup>62</sup> Krobb, p. 553.

<sup>63</sup> Per Thomas Andersen, pp. 49–81.

<sup>64</sup> Per Thomas Andersen, p. 132.

<sup>65</sup> Bauer, p. 70.

domains and discourses — for example, determinist philosophies intersect with notions of biological and evolutions decline which are conceptualised on the level of the individual as well as that of society and cultures as a whole.<sup>66</sup>

Bauer is however careful to argue that decadence should be considered a literary response to these troubling times, not a reflection or transparent mirroring of the fin de siècle crisis.<sup>67</sup> This points to the dilemma of how to theoretically and analytically articulate the relations between decadence and how it can be unfolded into analyses of literature and culture at the fin de siècle particularly in relation to the literary domain. The notable suggestiveness is tied to the semantic reinterpretation of decadence in the artistic and literary spheres, but its diffuseness points to how it also far exceeds the literary domain, and remains problematic as a critical and analytical term in literary studies. Approaches to theoretically articulate the relation between decadence and the literary domain sometimes rely on conceptualising and translating decadence in literary terms. The compilation of list of features discussed in the previous section is an example of this as it configures decadence in terms of a repertoire of themes and motifs. Similarly, decadence can be conceptualised as an aesthetic, a style, a pose<sup>68</sup> foregrounding it as an aesthetic mode of expression and performance. The relation of decadence to the literary domain can also be conceived in ways that have less to do with translating it into terms of art and literature, and more with highlighting how it is a significant aspect of fin de siècle culture more broadly as “a cultural mode of the last decades of the nineteenth century, a mode or an attitude,”<sup>69</sup> or a “moral and

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<sup>66</sup> Bauer, pp. 77–78.

<sup>67</sup> Bauer, p. 70.

<sup>68</sup> Marion Schmid, *Proust Dans La Décadence* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2008), p. 29.

<sup>69</sup> Schoolfield, p. xiii.

psychological state, a category of behaviour and attitude.”<sup>70</sup> These approaches do not, however, explicitly address how to articulate the meaningfulness of decadence as both interrelating broad cultural issues and discussions, as significantly tied to the literary and artistic domains.

This shifting between and intersection of different cultural levels and spheres of understanding contributes further to the fundamental ambiguity of the concept of decadence. As Ahlund points out: “Åtskilliga studier av litterär dekadens besvärar av vaghet i begreppsdefinitionen och ständiga glidningar mellan olika nivåer av dekadens”<sup>71</sup> (Several studies of literary decadence are bothered by the vagueness in the definition of the concept and constantly slides between different levels of decadence). The ambiguity and instability of the concept of decadence can therefore be understood as particularly tied to the broader cultural shifts, dissolutions and reformulations that are permeating all aspects of fin de siècle culture and society. Decadence is understood as profoundly imbricated in these broader cultural shifts and tensions. The particular semantic significant of the term at the time becomes linked to how it can mediate and facilitate a plurality of understandings, experiences and conceptualisations of the fin de siècle as a time of crisis. A further layer of analytical difficulty in relation to decadence, therefore, is how to conceptualise and analytically articulate these complex interrelations and intersections. In relation to literature in particular, theoretical and methodological difficulties arise in how to articulate the relations between particular literary renditions of decadence and the broader cultural and social phenomena of the fin de siècle, how to theorise and conceptualise the

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<sup>70</sup> Gilman, pp. 103–4.

<sup>71</sup> Ahlund, p. 170.

interactions between literary renditions of decadence and their interrelation with and configuration of broader cultural issues of the fin de siècle as time of crisis.

Andersen addresses these issues by dichotomising between a narrow literary meaning and a broader meaning as term of cultural critique related to theories of historical change — decadence could therefore be analytically conceptualised in “en «vid» historisk betydning og i en «snever» litterær betydning”<sup>72</sup> (a “wide” historical sense and in a “narrow” literary meaning). The broader historical meaning posits decadence as linked to notions of decay and decline, as a phase in cultural and historical trajectories, usually the final stages of a declining society. Andersen links this strand to the fall of the roman empire, and the works of Montesquieu, Gibbons, Spengler, and Nietzsche.<sup>73</sup> The narrow literary meaning is understood as linked to a literary phase or tendency at the end of the nineteenth century, particularly in France, conceptualised as the transition between naturalism and modernism.<sup>74</sup> Andersen emphasises that to understand decadence, the concept must be considered in relation to both the narrow and wider meanings,<sup>75</sup> but he does not offer particular methodological or theoretical resources for how to implement this.

As mentioned above, decadence as theory of historical change and cultural critique usually revolves around notions of decline, as a phase of decline in theories of historical, cultural and social trajectories.<sup>76</sup> Andersen does however suggest that in certain conceptualisations of decadence in terms of theories of cultural and historical change, the phase of decline is considered rather as a process of transition in which

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<sup>72</sup> Per Thomas Andersen, p. 50.

<sup>73</sup> Per Thomas Andersen, p. 50.

<sup>74</sup> Per Thomas Andersen, pp. 50–51.

<sup>75</sup> Per Thomas Andersen, p. 81.

<sup>76</sup> Per Thomas Andersen, pp. 131–32.



decadence therefore becomes reinterpreted as playing out “en evig dialektikk mellom stigning og fall” (an eternal dialectic between ascent and fall), in this way “[d]ekadansetid ble [...] ikke nødvendigvis synonymt med undergangstid; snarere måtte forfallet sees som ledd i en overgangstid” (a time of decadence was not necessarily synonymous with a time of decline; rather, decay had to be seen as part of a time of transition).<sup>77</sup> (This will be discussed further in the following part of this chapter.)

Andersen conceptualises decadence at the fin de siècle in the narrow meaning as a reaction to the dissolution of fundamental values and certainties which leads to a sense of disorientation. Andersen configures literary decadence as a response to this disorientation which “ga grobunn for både skeptiske, hedonistiske og mystiske tankestrømninger, ja, stundom også for «skandalepregede» protestholdninger i form av radikale inverteringer av de overleverte verdisystemer” (gave rise to both sceptical, hedonistic and mysterious movements of thought, even sometimes also to "scandalous" protests in the form of radical inversions of the traditional value systems).<sup>78</sup> Narrow literary decadence is therefore configured as a protest and reaction to the fin de siècle cultural crisis.

Andersen therefore conceptualises decadence around sets of tensions that interrelate different areas of thought. There is a fundamental tension between the dichotomisation of decadence into broad and narrow meaning, one meaning relating to theories of history and the other grounded more restrictively in literary and artistic spheres of the fin de siècle: “Som vi ser eksisterer det altså i faglitteraturen en klar, dobbeltbruk av begrepet dekadanse” (As we can see, there is a clear, dual use of the

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<sup>77</sup> Per Thomas Andersen, p. 132.

<sup>78</sup> Per Thomas Andersen, pp. 130–31.

term decadence in the research literature).<sup>79</sup> In addition, further tensions are identifiable within this overarching dichotomisation. Decadence as term of cultural critique and theory of history and change may not wholly and solely align with decline but can be configured as a tension between renewal and decline when understood as playing out processes of transition and change. In the narrow literary sense of decadence, a tension is identifiable in how it is configured as contestatory response, as protest to the sense of crisis, confusion, disillusionment and anxiety at the fin de siècle.

Kafitz operates similar dichotomisations in his theorisation of the concept of decadence. Kafitz highlights how at the fin de siècle a shift or turn in the meaning of decadence takes place.<sup>80</sup> The particular prevalence and ambiguity of decadence at the turn of the century is recurrently linked to a shift in its semantics and meaning at this time, particularly how decadence becomes positively reinterpreted in the literary and artistic spheres.<sup>81</sup> This semantic shift of decadence at the fin de siècle is understood as bringing about a fundamental tension at the core of the concept which is conceived in terms of a dichotomy, as sketched out above in relation to Andersen, between a cultural critical term and a contestatory artistic term. On the one hand, decadence is conceptualised as a term of cultural critique which connects to decadence as theories of historical and cultural development and carries connotations of moral, socio-political and biological decline, and, on the other hand, decadence can signify a deliberate provocation, protest and transgression. It is an aesthetic countermovement directed against bourgeois conventions and values as well as against classical aesthetics.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Per Thomas Andersen, p. 51.

<sup>80</sup> Kafitz, *Dekadenz.*, p. 7.

<sup>81</sup> Per Thomas Andersen, pp. 49–81, 130–31, 551; Bauer, p. 70; Gilman, p. 35; Kafitz, *Dekadenz.*, p. 7; Krobb, pp. 548, 549, 556, 559–60; Potolsky, 'Introduction', p. vi.

<sup>82</sup> Kafitz, *Dekadenz.*, p. 7.

Kafitz identifies Baudelaire as the initiator of this positive reinterpretation, and argues that, as a movement of deliberate transgression and provocation, the central stylistic strategy of decadent art is inversion and reversal.<sup>83</sup> In a similar way to Andersen, therefore, Kafitz develops his theorisation of decadence around a set of fundamental tensions. The tension between decadence as notion of cultural and critique embedded in theories of history and cultural development which contrasts with the particular reinterpretation of decadence as productive countermovement in the art and literature of the fin de siècle. Moreover, the understanding of decadence in terms of particular literary response at the fin de siècle is defined in terms of tension, protest and opposition to conventional modern bourgeois life.

The concept of decadence in the literary spheres therefore becomes conceptualised around the notion of fundamental inversion and protest: “In Wirklichkeit bedeutete die Dekadenz eher Protest und Auflehnung”<sup>84</sup> (In fact, decadence rather meant protest and rebellion). Krobb also argues how decadence is understood “as an antibourgeois current, a pose that defines itself in terms of deliberate rebellion against the prevailing nineteenth-century ideology of progress and development.”<sup>85</sup> Decadence therefore becomes analysed in terms of questioning bourgeois social institutions, and of negating bourgeois values.<sup>86</sup> Within the dual frame of cultural critique and counter-movement of provocation, decadence as an artistic countermovement represents a critical, polemical and transgressive stance “not only as a complete antithesis of bourgeois banality but also as a new means of shocking the middle class

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<sup>83</sup> Kafitz, *Dekadenz.*, p. 7.

<sup>84</sup> Koskimies, p. 112.

<sup>85</sup> Krobb, p. 549.

<sup>86</sup> Krobb, pp. 558–59.

(*épâter le bourgeois*).<sup>87</sup> Framed in terms of provocation and opposition, the commonly recurring strategy underpinning decadent style is frequently identified as inversion, as “systematically reversing, inverting, and otherwise unsettling commonly held assumptions.”<sup>88</sup> Similarly, in his compiling of features of literary decadence, Kafitz identifies “[den] kleinste[n] gemeinsame[n] Nenner” (the lowest common denominator) for literary decadence, the key recurring characteristic that underpins decadent literature as the proclivity in decadence towards the extreme, the abnormal, the uncommon, the desecration of the mundane and vulgar through a constant search and foregrounding of the strange and exceptional.<sup>89</sup> Kafitz therefore foregrounds decadence as an aesthetic of protest and contestation, and more precisely as protest against bourgeois normality: “[decadence] steht in polemischem Bezug zum bürgerlichen ‘Normalverhalten’”<sup>90</sup> ([decadence] stands in polemical relation to bourgeois “normalcy”). This taste for the extravagant, the extreme, the unusual and the strange constitutes a protest against bourgeois norms and attitudes. The mundane, the vulgar, the everyday is an object of contempt and is stylistically translated into the inverse propensity for the extravagant and the extreme (“Ungeheure und Schrankenlose”), the unusual and the strange.<sup>91</sup> Literary decadence is therefore often framed in terms of transgression either to escape mundane reality or to shock (*épâter*) bourgeois complacency and normalcy. As mentioned in I-1, the plurality and variability of motifs suggest how decadence intervenes and interrelates across a number of

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<sup>87</sup> Matei Călinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*, 2nd edn (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1987), p. 175.

<sup>88</sup> Richard Dellamora, ‘Productive Decadence: “The Queer Comradship of Outlawed Thought”: Vernon Lee, Max Nordau, Oscar Wilde’, *New Literary History*, Forms and/of Decadence, 35.4 (2004), 529–46 (p. 529); cf. also Spackman, p. 35.

<sup>89</sup> Kafitz, *Dekadenz.*, p. 15.

<sup>90</sup> Kafitz, *Dekadenz.*, p. 15.

<sup>91</sup> Kafitz, *Dekadenz.*, p. 15.

different domains, however, this plurality is analytically reduced in conceptualising the unifying element underpinning the variety and array of decadent resources and motifs as the protest, transgression, inversion and contestation of bourgeois normalcy.<sup>92</sup>

In his *Décadence in Deutschland* (2004), Kafitz undertakes an analysis of the discourse of “décadence”<sup>93</sup> in Germany across a number of periodicals from the time. The conclusions he comes to, however, are rather similar to those in his first work on decadence (which relied on a series of close readings). He suggests that, quantitatively speaking, the discourse of decadence aligns with a pejorative sense of decline:

Versucht man auf der Grundlage des quantitativen Befundes der synchronen Aussageanalyse zu einem Fazit zu gelangen, fällt an erster Stelle das Überwiegen pejorisierender Aussagen und entsprechender Abwehrreflexe auf. Dazu haben mehrere Faktoren beigetragen. Zunächst die lexikalische Fixierung des Begriffs Décadence im Sinne von Verfall und Niedergang, die zwar auch neutrale Verwendungen zuläßt (zum Beispiel Baudelaires Beschreibung des Sonnenuntergangs als Metapher für Décadence), die aber in der Regel mit zivilisationskritischen Konzepten verbunden wurde und damit eine Abwertung implizierte.<sup>94</sup>

(If one attempts to arrive at a conclusion on the basis of the quantitative findings of the synchronous statement analysis, the predominance of pejorative statements and corresponding withdrawal reflexes is most striking. Several factors contributed to this. First, the lexical fixation of the term *décadence* in the sense of decay and decline, which admittedly allows for neutral uses (for example, Baudelaire's description of the sunset as a metaphor for *décadence*), but which was usually associated with cultural critical concepts and thereby implied a denigration.)

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<sup>92</sup> cf. e.g. Krobb, p. 549; Kafitz, *Dekadenz*., pp. 15, 21.

<sup>93</sup> Kafitz overwhelmingly uses the French spelling of the word — when he does mention “Dekadenz” it is either in citation (e.g. pp. 124-125, 145, 149, 156, 157, 161, 166, 168, 170, 175) or in discussions of the various spellings of the term e.g. pp. 150-153.

<sup>94</sup> Kafitz, *Décadence*., p. 283.

However, he also acknowledges an opposing strand of decadence discourse, a counter discourse that would not be primarily connected to decline but relates to literary ideas (such as emphasising the sensitivity of experiences and understandings, and an emphasis on form rather than content):

Trotz der Pathologisierung der Décadence lassen sich, wenigstens in den frühen 90er Jahren, Ansätze eines affirmativen Gegendiskurses ausmachen. Hermann Bahr vor 1894, Christensen mit seinem Beitrag in der Frankfurter Zeitung, Wilhelm Weigand und einige Artikel weniger bekannter Kritiker belegen die Präsenz eines alternativen Sprechens innerhalb des Décadence-Diskurses. Hier deutet sich die Möglichkeit der Herausbildung eines Décadence-Begriffs an, der die Verfalls-Konnotationen weitgehend abgestreift hat zugunsten einer Betonung der Sensibilisierung der Wahrnehmung und des Erlebens sowie der Dominanz der sprachkünstlerischen Aspekte gegenüber der Inhaltsseite der Dichtung.<sup>95</sup>

(Despite the pathologisation of *décadence*, at least in the early 1890s, approaches of affirmative counter-discourse can be identified. Hermann Bahr before 1894, Christensen with his contribution in the Frankfurter Zeitung, Wilhelm Weigand and some articles of lesser-known critics prove the presence of an alternative semantic within the *décadence* discourse. This suggests the possibility of the emergence of a concept of *décadence*, which has largely shed the decay connotations in favour of an emphasis on the refinement of perception and experience as well as the dominance of the linguistic aesthetics of the poem of its content.)

Kafitz's analysis of the discourse of decadence therefore follows the dichotomised paradigm of decadence he developed in *Dekadenz in Deutschland* (1987). Kafitz therefore seems unable to move away from this dualistic framework as analytical organisational principle even after, or perhaps because of, his engagement with the vast array of potential configurations that constitute the *décadence* discourse.

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<sup>95</sup> Kafitz, *Décadence*, p. 284.

Dichotomising decadence in terms of cultural critique on the one hand and oppositional art movement on the other, even if simply as a means of analytical organisation and clarity, can solidify into interpretative conclusions which magnify a particular strand of discourse on decadence, instead of engaging with the role decadence could be playing in the development of different discursive configurations. Complex discursive entanglements become collapsed along facile lines of distinction in order to facilitate analysis. Kafitz, for example, does not think the inversion motif leads to any new meaningful aesthetic, but is simply an inversion of existing motifs.<sup>96</sup> Decadent style merely functions on the principle of a one-to-one inversion, where the common or everyday is replaced with the unusual or extraordinary, health with illness and so on.<sup>97</sup> Other researchers, however, conceptualise the motif of inversion as a productive strategy for the elaboration and exploration of new modes of expression — in this way, crisis becomes a motor for innovation and reformulation, not a sense of decline.<sup>98</sup> Weir writes that “never before have so many artists and writers been so obsessed with various processes and manifestations of decay — and drawn so much life, so much creative energy, from the very decadence they decry.”<sup>99</sup> Similarly, Marshall perceives the fin de siècle as “a period of tremendous vitality, in which debate and controversy are central.”<sup>100</sup> Thus, the fin de siècle would be a moment of exploration, of debate and discussion, experimentation and questioning in which all spheres of cultural life are involved, particularly the arts. Marshall therefore paints a picture of dynamism and energy rather than exhaustion and gloom. Thain also

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<sup>96</sup> Kafitz, *Dekadenz.*, pp. 16–17.

<sup>97</sup> Kafitz, *Dekadenz.*, p. 17.

<sup>98</sup> Constable, Potolsky, Matthew, and Denisoff, p. 12.

<sup>99</sup> Weir, p. xii.

<sup>100</sup> Gail Marshall, ‘Introduction’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Gail Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 1–12 (p. 5).

understands decadence as evidence of “a self-conscious desire for a new aesthetic and a new beginning” rather than exhaustion and decline.<sup>101</sup>

On the other hand, Dubois emphasises the self-liquidation of decadent narratives: “L’action même se réduit à peu; à peine ébauchée, elle avorte. C’est le roman de l’échec et de la dérobade...”<sup>102</sup> (the plot/action does not amount to much; it is scarcely begun that it aborts. It is the novel of failure, of evasion...). Andersen also conceptualises literary decadence in terms of ultimate failure. Decadent literature, as response to the fin de siècle crisis, Andersen argues, is ultimately about grappling with dissolution in the search for certainty. Decadent narratives therefore revolve around the dissolution of coherence and previous understandings, and the efforts to reconstitute a sense of coherence out of dissolution.<sup>103</sup> Andersen posits that ultimately, however, the decadent search fails — either the search for authentic life and coherence is abandoned and instead the protagonist has to become satisfied with staging, performing life; or the figure of the decadent does not find reconciliation, lives a life of estrangement or takes their own life.<sup>104</sup> The array of possibilities opened up through destabilisation and explored through a searching movement are crystallised and collapsed around an ultimate decline and pessimism.<sup>105</sup>

Whilst critical insights into the fundamental dualities and tensions at the core of decadence are useful premises for further critical insight, they therefore do not constitute a well-developed theorisation of decadence. Critics often recognise the

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<sup>101</sup> Marion Thain, ‘Poetry’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Gail Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 223–40 (p. 223).

<sup>102</sup> Jacques Dubois, ‘Entre Nécessité et Contingence: Le Roman Decadent’, in *Mimesis et Semiosis. Littérature et Représentation*, ed. by P. Hamon and J.-P. Leduc-Adine (Paris: Nathan, 1992), pp. 379–90 (p. 380).

<sup>103</sup> Per Thomas Andersen, pp. 551–52.

<sup>104</sup> Per Thomas Andersen, pp. 18–19.

<sup>105</sup> Per Thomas Andersen, pp. 130–31.



conflictual tensions within the fin de siècle context itself, the problematic and subversive coexistence of optimism and pessimism, of a sense of progress and liberation coupled with anxiety, unrest and disillusionment, but decadence is often understood as significant only in relation to one side of these tensions — as either modern innovation or fin de siècle disillusionment and failure. Throughout this part of the chapter, I have discussed how the particular ambiguity and diffuseness of decadence at the fin de siècle, linked to its semantic reformulation at this time, is conceptualised as constituted through fundamental tensions. It is a term that is relevant to broader cultural and social shifts taking place at the fin de siècle, but it is also a term that is identified as particularly relevant to the literary and artistic spheres at the fin de siècle. Decadence is therefore understood as fundamentally interrelating different cultural domains and levels. These ambiguities are usually addressed by dichotomising and separating out the different strands of meaning of decadence. These dichotomous approaches, however, restrict the productive ambiguity of decadence as destabilising semantic force. The insights into the constitutive tensions of decadence as discussed in this section suggest that these tensions can be conceptualised as a semantic force for destabilisation and reformulation unfolding different meaning possibilities. However, understanding these constitutive tensions in terms of dichotomies and keeping the notion of their semantic force as rooted in protest and inversion restricts the possibilities of understanding and conceptualising the plurality of meaningful and semantic possibilities decadence can stimulate and explore. Approaching decadence in terms of systems theory and discourse would provide theoretical and conceptual resources that would enable articulating the interrelations between different domains in analytically robust but flexible ways. Furthermore, the critical insight that decadence is characterised by fundamental tensions and strategies of inversion can also be explicitly

explored, developed and incorporated into a theorisation of decadence in terms of discourse and process of signification. As already suggested in the previous section in the discussion comparing cumulative approaches (compiling lists of features) and strategic and functional approaches (as suggest by Bauer and Constable et al.), a productive approach to decadence would be to conceptualise it as a resource as well as strategy in discursive and semantic processes of (re)signification (rather than as strictly a protest movement against bourgeois and modern society). This enables a more nuanced and pluralised engagement with the variety of resources, tensions, interrelations and intersections that are played out through decadence. Decadence can be understood as articulating different discursive resources from different cultural spheres and domains into a variety of meaningful configurations which explore and play out different responses to fundamental changes in fin de siècle culture and society. Decadence can therefore be understood as participating in the reformulations and destabilisations of fin de siècle culture and society by providing discursive and semantic resources and strategies that facilitate and play out processes of destabilisation and exploration.

### **I - 3 - Decadent Liminality: Decadence as Process and Dynamics of Change**

So far we have explored how the fundamental ambiguity and elusiveness of decadence is linked to how it is a diffuse concept at the fin de siècle, how it can be considered as providing a suggestive repertoire of semantic and creative resources which stimulate

the articulation of a plurality of different meanings, and how it permeates and interrelates different cultural spheres and discourses and encompasses sets of tensions. As mentioned in the previous part of the chapter, certain scholars have framed decadence in terms of theories of history and development in a way that provides crucial critical insights in how to theorise and conceptualise this fundamental ambiguity of decadence in productive ways. These approaches understand the fundamental ambiguity of decadence in terms of liminality. In this way, the tensions that constitute decadence are reframed as facilitating a dynamics of change and transition. Understanding decadent ambiguity in terms of liminality opens up critical possibilities for theorising decadence as exploring and performing change, uncertainty and instability.

Despite emphasising the particular significance and ambiguity of decadence at the fin de siècle as linked to the literary and artistic spheres,<sup>106</sup> decadence remains a problematic and elusive concept in analyses of literature. Whissen suggests that it can only be a useful term for literary research in limited and narrow research contexts where consensus can be reached on the significance and meaning of the term (he refers to the late nineteenth century French and English literary contexts in particular).<sup>107</sup> Geddes also warns that “[d]ecadence is a term which often proves more misleading than helpful to literary history or analysis.”<sup>108</sup> Literary studies of decadence labour under the additional hurdle that decadence cannot be satisfactorily understood as a literary movement *per se*; there is no identifiable decadence movement as decadence is both highly relevant to literary production at the fin de siècle but also

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<sup>106</sup> cf. e.g. earlier discussions of Per Thomas Andersen, p. 50; Kafitz, *Dekadenz.*, p. 7.

<sup>107</sup> Whissen, p. xi.

<sup>108</sup> Geddes, ‘Swedish Fin-de-Siècle: Hjalmar Söderberg (1869-1941)’, p. 109.

fundamentally goes beyond it.<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, decadence exists in a highly unstable relation to other movements of the fin de siècle — there are significant overlaps between decadence and other labels of artistic classification at the time. As noted by Stableford: “It is certainly true that Decadent literature overlaps with several other genres and movements, and that many of its key words can equally well be discussed under other labels.”<sup>110</sup> In his analysis of the discourse of *décadence*, Kafitz also notes how it is difficult to demarcate decadence from other related concept at the time:

Zunächst fällt dabei die unklare und widersprüchliche Verwendung der Vokabel *Décadence* auf. Damit verbunden ist ein hoher Unschärfegrad bei der Abgrenzung von vergleichbaren literarischen Kategorien wie Symbolismus oder Fin de siècle. Diese werden oft nur tautologisch eingesetzt oder sie bilden mit *Décadence* zusammen Kombinationen und Filiationen, die nicht zur Klärung beitragen, sondern eher von der Schwierigkeit der Begriffsbildung zeugen.<sup>111</sup>

(It is first and foremost striking how unclear and contradictory the uses of the word *décadence* are. This is linked to the high degree of uncertainty in the demarcation from comparable literary categories such as symbolism or fin de siècle. These are often simply used tautologically or together with *Décadence* they form combinations and filiations that do not contribute to the clarification, but rather testify to the difficulty of forming a concept.)

Kafitz suggests that decadence is particularly overlooked in research on the fin de siècle since a number of other classificatory labels of fin de siècle literature and culture (such impressionism, fin de siècle, neo-romanticism, symbolism and aestheticism) overlap significantly with decadence, and appear more frequently and more convincingly than decadence. The ambiguity of decadence and its liminality in relation

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<sup>109</sup> Bernheimer, p. 27; Gilman, pp. 103–4; Potolsky, ‘Introduction’, p. v; Schoofield, p. xiii; Whissen, p. xi.

<sup>110</sup> *The Dedalus Book of Decadence. Moral Ruins*, ed. by Brian Stableford, 2nd edn (Sawtry: Dedalus Books, 1990), p. 9.

<sup>111</sup> Kafitz, *Décadence*, pp. 281–82.

to other literary classifications and labels render decadence a term that is too unstable to be useful as a critical and analytical terms which explains how decadence is dismissed as relevant concept for literary analysis at the fin de siècle, according to Kafitz.<sup>112</sup>

Decadence not only appears as particularly difficult to distinguish from other movements of the fin de siècle, it is also recurrently explicitly conceptualised in relation to other movements and in terms of transition between movements. Kafitz notes how decadence has been linked to romanticism and analysed as the dark side of romanticism (“die schwarze Romantik”) most notably in the seminal work by Mario Praz.<sup>113</sup> Moreover, decadence is often conceptualised as a transitory phase bridging romanticism and modernism, or realism, naturalism and modernism.<sup>114</sup> In particular, the filiations between naturalism and decadence have frequently been discussed.

Andersen, for example, notes:

Vanligvis brukes dekadansebegrepet i fransk kontekst til å dekke en litteraturhistorisk overgangstid mellom naturalismen på den ene siden og modernismen og den begynnende nythomismen på den andre siden. Dekadansen befinner seg da i opposisjon til naturalismen samtidig som den dels utgår nettopp fra naturalismen og i flere henseender sitter fast i de samme problemstillinger som naturalismen.<sup>115</sup>

(Usually, the decadence concept in the French contexts is used to cover a literary history of transition between naturalism on the one hand and modernism and the beginning of neo-thomism on the other hand. Decadence is situated then in opposition to naturalism, while it is also partly based on naturalism and in many respects rooted in the same issues as naturalism.)

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<sup>112</sup> Kafitz, *Décadence*, p. 7.

<sup>113</sup> Kafitz, *Dekadenz*, p. 12.

<sup>114</sup> cf. e.g. Weir, p. 8.

<sup>115</sup> Per Thomas Andersen, p. 51.

In the citation above, the entanglements between decadence and naturalism are particularly apparent — alternatively conceptualised as contrasting movements in opposition to one another, but also revolving around similar issues and feeding into one another. A similar point is made by Bernheimer when he notes how

[m]ost naturalist texts include, or perhaps I should say produce, decadent moments, whereas the sense of natural process that subtends most decadent texts is entirely naturalistic in character. It is as if each attitude, style, approach — however one may wish to designate naturalism and decadence — acted like the unconscious of the other.<sup>116</sup>

Of course, categorical labels of literary movements are analytical tools to facilitate discussion and analysis, and there is always a certain degree of overlap between different categories,<sup>117</sup> but the overlaps and interrelations with other movements and concepts appear as particularly salient and problematic in relation to decadence. This highlights the particular liminality the concept — decadence appears as fundamentally relational, a term that is difficult to isolate and characterise in itself, and is more easily grasped through processes of comparison and differentiation. In this way, decadence has often been understood as facilitating exploration, change and transition — the difficulties of isolating and characterising decadence as a movement in itself has led to the understanding of decadence as transition towards modern literature.

The conceptualisation of decadence as liminal concept that facilitates a process of transition and change has been elaborated in certain approaches to decadence in terms of theories of history and development. Morley notes that: “The concept of decadence, especially when applied to a society or a culture but in many cases also

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<sup>116</sup> Bernheimer, p. 58.

<sup>117</sup> Geddes, ‘Swedish Fin-de-Siècle: Hjalmar Söderberg (1869-1941)’, p. 109.

when used as a term of aesthetic criticism, is closely related to ideas of temporality and historical change.”<sup>118</sup> The framing of decadence in terms of theories of history and change could seem to mirror the literary approaches to decadence that conceptualise decadence in terms of protest and opposition to bourgeois values. For example, Potolsky characterises decadent theories of development as “hold[ing] a distorting mirror up to modern historical logic itself”<sup>119</sup> — where modern historical understanding perceives time as linear, teleological, incrementally progressive, decadence upsets this by emphasising circularity and cyclicity; decadence’s approach to history is a swarm of detail, but without causality or explanation.<sup>120</sup> Similarly, Morley argues that decadence challenges modern conceptualisations of history and change by offering an alternative logic of historical development:

The dominant modern perspective on the past seeks to combine on the one hand a sense of continuity between past and present, as the modern age is the culmination and fulfilment of all previous developments, and earlier periods contain within themselves familiar elements of what has now become modern, and on the other hand a sense of separation from and superiority to all previous, nonmodern, societies.<sup>121</sup>

On the other hand,

Decadence offers a very different conception of the relation between past and present. It sees the past as fragmented rather than unified; modernity is placed in opposition to some parts, seen as analogous to others. It questions modernity’s choice of comparisons: not classical Greece or the Renaissance but Alexandria or Rome. It undermines modernity’s sense of

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<sup>118</sup> Neville Morley, ‘Decadence as a Theory of History’, *New Literary History*, Forms and/of Decadence, 35.4 (2004), 573–85 (p. 573).

<sup>119</sup> Potolsky, ‘Introduction’, p. vii.

<sup>120</sup> Potolsky, ‘Introduction’, p. vii.

<sup>121</sup> Morley, p. 579.

superiority, and plays on its deep-seated fear that the past has not in fact been overcome, that the triumph over superstition and autocracy has been incomplete, or that, having overcome previous societies, the process of history will continue and it will be overcome and replaced in its turn.<sup>122</sup>

In Morley's comparison of modern and decadent theories of history and change, the decadent logic appears to destabilise particular modern distinctions: for example, decadence collapses distinctions between past and present by developing a sense of pluralised similarities and differences with the past as a variegated archive rather than a monolithic distinction between past and present. Decadence also destabilises modern distinctions between notions progress, superiority and failure, decline by developing instead of sense of cyclical processes of development. In this way, the relation between decadent logics of temporality and modern logics of temporality is understood not purely as oppositional, but rather, decadence becomes a strategy and resource to destabilise modern historical logics. Morley still describes decadence substantively in relation to notions of decline and argues how decline and decadence rely on a similar repository of ideas.<sup>123</sup> Decadence is understood as drawing on particular repositories and resources of images, motifs and ideas to configure decay and decline — in particular the biological and natural semantics of time and development (e.g. natural rhythm, life cycles).<sup>124</sup> Along with organic metaphors, decadence is also understood to draw on the past as archival resource for configuring decline:

The past offers not only the image of the ideal, but also an idea of what it is to be in decline. The concept of decadence is based on a

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<sup>122</sup> Morley, pp. 579–80.

<sup>123</sup> Morley, p. 575.

<sup>124</sup> Morley, p. 573.



pathology, a set of symptoms, drawn from earlier examples: above all, imperial Rome.<sup>125</sup>

However, these resources are not then understood as transparently referring to what decadence means. Rather, there is a tension in Morley's analysis between a sense of decadence as a particular theory of history and change, and decadence as a particular part or phase in theories of history and change. Morley suggests that decadence should not wholly be equated with phases of decline, and recognises that change does not necessarily operate according to dichotomised values of progress and decline:

"Decadence" does not necessarily mark the last stage before a cycle repeats itself; it may instead be seen as the penultimate stage before a range of possible endings to come within reach, the point where the present weakens enough to make an alternative conceivable – although of course there is little agreement among writers as to what will, or should, take its place.<sup>126</sup>

This therefore moves away from strictly binary and cyclical notions of decline and sequential renewal, and instead suggests a destabilisation that opens up an array of possibilities.

These conceptualisations of decadence as theory of history and change recognise how the tensions at the heart of decadence are fundamentally constitutive of its meaning and significance. Decadence relies on the tensions between renewal and decline in its destabilisation of modern logics of history and temporality. In this way, decadence as theory of change relies not only a repertoire of resources, but these are drawn on and used in a strategic process of destabilisation of modern historical logics in order to explore other historical possibilities: "'Decadence' insists on remembering, in

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<sup>125</sup> Morley, p. 578.

<sup>126</sup> Morley, p. 574.

the belief that the past contains all future possibilities.”<sup>127</sup> The swarm of detail,<sup>128</sup> the archival approach to the past as repertoire of motifs, are therefore not only resources but also strategies in the process of destabilisation and exploration. These strategies rely on making visible the repertoire of resources, the past as archive, in order to create a particular self-consciousness that foregrounds the present as liminal process, as moment of transition, as “a necessary transition to a higher stage.”<sup>129</sup> In this approach, decadence appears as a particular process of exploration and understanding, as a method of self-conscious positioning which simulates a systemic view in which objects and subjects are positioned in relation to one another, and are understood in terms of their place within the system rather than in terms of their essential nature or character.<sup>130</sup> The diffuse ambiguity of decadence therefore becomes reframed as liminality — it is a resource and strategy for facilitating destabilisation and effecting change and transition. Decadence is not simply a period of transition which “sits uncomfortably between the ‘discarded old and the anticipated new’,”<sup>131</sup> not only a phase in particular theories of historical development. Rather, it can be reframed “less [as] a period of transition than a dynamics of transition.”<sup>132</sup> Tying the understanding of decadence too strongly to ideas of doom and decline covers up the ambivalence and nuances in self-experience and self-understanding that decadence stimulates and explores. Decadence “as a paradigm for exploring historical, artistic, and social change”<sup>133</sup> enables us to productively reframe and reconceptualise the role and

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<sup>127</sup> Morley, p. 583.

<sup>128</sup> Potolsky, ‘Introduction’, p. vii.

<sup>129</sup> Morley, p. 579.

<sup>130</sup> Morley, p. 573.

<sup>131</sup> Krobb, p. 555.

<sup>132</sup> Weir, p. 15.

<sup>133</sup> Potolsky, ‘Introduction’, p. v.

function of decadence as force of destabilisation and exploration. Decadence therefore becomes understood as process and dynamics.

In *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (1918) Mann writes:

Ich gehöre geistig jenem über ganz Europa verbreiteten Geschlecht von Schriftstellern an, die, aus der *décadence* kommend, zu Chronisten und Analytikern der *décadence* bestellt, gleichzeitig den emanzipatorischen Willen zur Absage an sie — sagen wir pessimistisch: die Velleität dieser Absage im Herzen tragen und mit der Überwindung von Dekadenz und Nihilismus wenigstens *experimentieren*.<sup>134</sup>

(Intellectually, I belong to that race of writers throughout Europe who, coming from *décadence*, appointed to be chroniclers and analysts of *décadence*, at the same time have the emancipatory desire to reject it — let us say pessimistically: they bear the velleity of this rejection in their hearts and at least *experiment* with overcoming decadence and nihilism.)<sup>135</sup>

Mann configures his relation to decadence as simultaneous engagement and renunciation. As Schoolfield argues: “In all Mann’s decadent works, there lies a marked awareness of the lure of decadence as well as a criticism or rejection of it — but this statement could be more about almost all the major ‘decadent’ novelists.”<sup>136</sup> Similarly, Geddes notes how Söderberg is considered the foremost representative of decadence, and yet, Söderberg subverts his own decadent narrative particularly in his use of irony.<sup>137</sup> In this way, Söderberg displays a particular ambivalence, similar to Mann,

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<sup>134</sup> Thomas Mann, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (Berlin: S. Fischer Verlag, 1920), p. 179 emphasis in original.

<sup>135</sup> Thomas Mann, *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*, trans. by Walter D. Morris (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1983), p. 144 emphasis in original.

<sup>136</sup> Schoolfield, p. 270.

<sup>137</sup> Geddes, ‘Swedish Fin-de-Siècle: Hjalmar Söderberg (1869-1941)’, p. 112.

caught between a sympathy for and understanding of decadence, and an ironic detachment from it.<sup>138</sup>

The role of decadence in the creative process therefore emerges in terms of both identification and subversion, as a process of exploratory self-reference and self-differentiation. Decadence can therefore become productively understood as a stimulus for exploring and combining creative possibilities, as stimulating processes of exploration and change. In relation to the German context in particular, it has often been emphasised how decadence cannot truly be considered a domestic discourse but remains a foreign influence.<sup>139</sup> The use of the French *décadence* in the German context, particularly by Nietzsche, supports and highlights further the conceptualisation of decadence as a process of self-differentiation and self-reference by making visible what is hidden within through the help of an otherising mirror. Schoolfield has noted, for example, how Gerhard Ouckama Knoop's novel *Die Dekadenten* (1898) "is set wholly in France and has Frenchmen as all its characters."<sup>140</sup> Knoop is drawing on a repertoire of suggestive cultural resources, deploying these through a process of self-reference and self-differentiation. Similarly, the article by the Norwegian Hjalmar Christensen on "Décadence" (1894) is often pinpointed as significant for the introduction of decadence to Germany and German public discourse.<sup>141</sup> In the Scandinavian context, the authors Ola Hansson and Stella Kleves (nom de plume of Mathilde Kruse) have been identified as introducing decadence to Sweden through articles in the feminist newspaper *Framåt* between the years 1886-1889. Significantly, Ola Hansson lived in Germany from 1889

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<sup>138</sup> Geddes, 'Swedish Fin-de-Siècle: Hjalmar Söderberg (1869-1941)', p. 136.

<sup>139</sup> Krobb, p. 548.

<sup>140</sup> Schoolfield, p. 268.

<sup>141</sup> Sørensen, p. 427.

and Stella Kleves in Copenhagen.<sup>142</sup> Rather than considering this as solely a particularity of German decadence, the semantic force of decadence can become understood as foundationally facilitating processes of exploration, experimentation through self-reference and self-differentiation.

Potolsky argues that, since decadence etymologically (from the Latin *de + cadere*) means to fall down or from, then “[b]y definition, it describes a temporal contrast or comparison.”<sup>143</sup> In theories of history and change, the significance and force of decadence is understood as rooted “in its narratives of decay and renewal.”<sup>144</sup> Yet, Potolsky also recognises the necessity to move beyond conceptualising decadence purely in terms of theories of time and history.<sup>145</sup> Decadence understood in terms of theories of change are useful in highlighting the critical insights into decadence as paradigm, as dynamics of exploration and change, but there is a need to move beyond understanding these paradigms and dynamics strictly in historical terms. Approaches that conceptualise decadence in terms of theories of change are useful in the way in which they incorporate insights the fundamental ambiguity of decadence into a theory that productively theorises decadence as liminal. Decadence is conceived not as either repertoire of suggestive resources or as strategy, but as combining these in a process for exploring and performing different possibilities of change. The fundamental tensions that constitute decadence are not analytically dichotomised but understood as co-constitutive in this process of playing out different possibilities of change. However, these perspectives on decadence as theories of change remain grounded in notions and discourses of history and temporality. The theorisation of decadence anchored in

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<sup>142</sup> Witt-Brattström, p. 35.

<sup>143</sup> Potolsky, ‘Introduction’, p. v.

<sup>144</sup> Potolsky, ‘Introduction’, p. ix.

<sup>145</sup> Potolsky, ‘Introduction’, p. vi.

terms of temporality and theories of history and change is restricted to a temporal reframing of decadence as renewal and decline. These theorisations therefore do not address how to theoretically and methodologically articulate the intersections and interrelations that decadence operates across a variety of cultural domains, particularly in relation to how to conceptualise its reinterpretation in the artistic and literary domains in relation to its significance in relation to broad cultural issues and reformulations at the fin de siècle, as discussed in the previous part of this chapter (1-3).

The insights into decadence as facilitating transition and change can therefore be productively translated in terms of theories of signification and meaning. Notions of instability, destabilisation and undecidability as stimulus for exploration point to how decadence can be understood as processes of articulation and (re)signification — the destabilising and reformulating potential of decadence is therefore a semantic force. In this framework, decadence is broadened as an exploration of the complexities of different modes of being, understanding and meaning. Conceptualised in terms of theories of language and meaning, and as a dynamics of transition, decadence can be understood as playing out processes of (re)signification. The tension between significance and ambiguity as identified in the first part of this chapter, can therefore be related to how decadence is a process, a resource and strategy, that plays out processes of (re)signification. Decadence no longer follows cycles of decline and renewal conceptualised in terms of identity and opposition, but rather performs recursive processes in a logic of repetition and variation. Decadence does not necessarily need to be positioned in terms of pure opposition to the bourgeoisie or pure decline, but can be conceived as a process for exploring different tensions and possibilities of bourgeois modes of living and of conceptualisations of time and temporality. As will be discussed further in Chapter III, Mann puts Spinell and

Klötterjahn in tension in *Tristan*, these are types, neither of which are attractive or sustainable ways of living, but putting them in tension in the novella can be understood as a process for exploring different ways of living. After all, “épâter” — in the well known rallying cry of the decadent to scandalise and shock the bourgeois<sup>146</sup> — does not just mean to surprise and shock, but also to impress.<sup>147</sup> The decadent relations to the bourgeois are more than strict opposition and protest, and can be productively reconceptualised as processes of bourgeois self-questioning, self-exploration and self-reinvention. As discussed in the first part of this chapter (I-1), decadence is recurrently related to issues of meaning and significance. Theories of time and change constitute, I would argue, only one aspect of the potential semantic force and significance of decadence. In this project, therefore, I translate these valuable critical insights on decadence from theories of change into theories of language and meaning. This translation will enable a different emphasis that would open up a different theoretical vantage point and perspective on decadence.

#### **I - 4 - Decadence as Troubling Process: Decadence as Playing Out Processes of (Re)signification**

In this first section of this chapter, I highlighted how a recurring dilemma in research on decadence revolves around issues of meaning and significance. Furthermore, the concept of decadence emerges as particularly significant in relation to literature and

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<sup>146</sup> cf. e.g. Călinescu, p. 175.

<sup>147</sup> ‘Épâter’, *Le Petit Robert* (Version Numérique 2.5, 2018) <<https://pr-bvdep-com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/robert.asp>> [accessed 7 May 2019].

culture of the fin de siècle, yet the fundamental ambiguity and elusiveness of the term frustrates attempts to incorporate it into analyses of the literature and culture of the time. This fundamental ambiguity can be related to how (a) the term is particularly diffuse and widespread bringing together an array of conflicting meanings; (b) decadence interrelates different cultural domains and discourses, and problematically permeates and exceeds both broader cultural contexts and particular artistic and literary domains; (c) fundamental tensions constitute the understanding of decadence; (d) decadence is fundamentally liminal — it appears to facilitate movement between different elements and stimulate processes of change and exploration. Throughout the chapter I have discussed various approaches to this decadent ambiguity and liminality. This project aligns with the approaches that recognise that the ambiguity and liminality at the core of decadence is what constitutes its particular meaningfulness and significance at the fin de siècle, and develop analyses around these insights.

Productively addressing and harnessing the fundamental ambiguity of decadence is the key premise to research on decadence, and the underpinning drive motivating this project. Furthermore, an approach conceiving of decadence in terms of theories of language and meaning can accommodate the fundamental ambiguity and liminality of decadence that is recurrently identified by researchers. It provides a framework for conceptualising and analytically managing the structural tensions and interrelations that constitute decadence. Considering decadence as a strategy of self-differentiation and recursion, rather than inversion and opposition, can enable researchers to go beyond classic dichotomisations that underpin approaches to decadence, and see these less as pure opposition and more as discursive resources involved in processes of articulation and (re)signification. This enables me to reframe the tropes and styles and



motifs identified and associated with decadence in a broader perspective of processes of reformulation and negotiation unfolding at the time.

Reframing decadence in terms of theories of language and meaning transforms problematic issues of ambiguity and liminality that frustrate analysis into interpretative springboards: “Ultimately, we shall see that the very elusiveness of the notion of decadence is significant; that is, elusiveness signifies meaning.”<sup>148</sup> The diffuseness and elusiveness of decadence can be understood as making visible and facilitating processes of destabilisation, exploration and reformulation — in other words, processes of articulation (in discourse theoretical terms) and re-entry (in Luhmannian terms) as will be discussed further in the following chapter (Chapter II). Bernheimer highlights the paradoxical idea that the particular semantic force of decadence is precisely a certain productive failure of signification. Decadence facilitates processes of (re)signification rather than favouring any particular discursive configuration — decadence “signifies precisely by means of this apparent failure.”<sup>149</sup> A substantive approach would therefore be misguided, since “[i]t is not the referential content of the term that conveys its meaning so much as the dynamics of paradox and ambivalence that it sets in motion.”<sup>150</sup> The significance and meaning of decadence is therefore not to be understood in terms of substantive meaning, of transparency, as relating to some kind of reality, but rather as a process of destabilisation, a process of playing out and holding together paradoxical tensions in a movement of exploration that does not necessarily settle meaning but rather keeps open the possibilities of meaningful configuration.<sup>151</sup> Decadence therefore functions as stimulus for critical development in

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<sup>148</sup> Weir, p. 11.

<sup>149</sup> Bernheimer, p. 6.

<sup>150</sup> Bernheimer, p. 5.

<sup>151</sup> Bernheimer, pp. xvii, 6.

the way it enables frustrating epistemological irresolution<sup>152</sup> — this will be discussed further in relation to Nietzsche in particular in Chapter III-2-A. The focus of this thesis therefore is to theoretically and methodological formalise these insights into decadence as process of (re)signification. One way in which this process of (re)signification, of epistemological exploration unfolds is through the playing out of paradoxical tensions.

Bernheimer flags up a number of instances in which decadence holds together paradoxical and conflicting meanings in tension. In particular:

Decadence appears on the one hand to erode meaning, on the other to insists on its value and relevance. Aesthetically and politically, the first tendency is modern, disruptive, experimental, whereas the second is conservative and nostalgic. It is tempting to give one of these perspectives precedence over the other [...] But to be true to the irritating irresolution of the decadent idea one must, I believe, recognise the equal force of its contradictory tendencies.<sup>153</sup>

In order to productively approach decadence, therefore, there is a need to theorise how to hold together and explore the dynamics of paradoxical tension without collapsing and promoting one aspect over another. Decadence is a concept “in which an entire process is semiotically concentrated”,<sup>154</sup> and this process can be understood as the process of signification itself. Decadence makes visible the playing out of paradoxical tensions in the process of signification. In making visible the very processes of destabilisation of meaning, decadence is suspended in undecidability. In this context, inversion as recurrent trope of in decadent aesthetics would be focussing on only one part of the process of destabilisation. Rather than inversion, a number of researchers

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<sup>152</sup> Bernheimer, pp. 8, 28.

<sup>153</sup> Bernheimer, p. 55.

<sup>154</sup> Stanley Corngold, ‘Decadent Subjects by Charles Bernheimer. Book Review’, *Comparative Literature*, 56.4 (2004), 365–67 (p. 366).

suggest paradox. The use of paradox advocates a revolt against norms whilst also being conscious that the aesthetic that is posited is not a necessarily plausible solution, and even that there might be no solution at all.<sup>155</sup> Paradox is a strategy for holding together contradictory and incompatible terms in a ways that foregrounds and plays out undecidability and unease.<sup>156</sup> Thain notes how paradox can

enabl[e] writers to unite a world that was beginning to fragment along a number of different fault lines while simultaneously acknowledging those newly prominent fissures. In this way, the Decadent lyric both acknowledged implicitly the impossibility of its unified vision in the modern world, even while it forged, at its best, a finely wrought artistic conceit that enabled reconciliations not quite possible in life.<sup>157</sup>

Different aspects are put into tension with one another as in the example above in which the particular meaningful possibilities of poetry are drawn on to express and explore the impossibilities of establishing definite meaning. Paradox therefore can be understood as a strategy of recursion. By holding together incompatible meanings it can enable the elaboration of meaning whilst simultaneously subverting and questioning that meaning; it plays out a process of self-reference and self-differentiation by making visible within itself incompatible aspects of its self. Such a strategy therefore serves to foreground the processes through which signification takes place, rather than seeking to establish any particular meaning. Strategies of recursion therefore simulate processes of (re)signification, i.e. of self-reference and self-differentiation by making visible the other within and suspending any definite closure. This is closely related to the process of (re)signification and autopoiesis as

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<sup>155</sup> Călinescu, pp. 210–11.

<sup>156</sup> Thain, p. 225.

<sup>157</sup> Thain, p. 226.

developed by Luhmann in his systems theory. Particularly, how systems develop and sustain their meaningfulness and coherence through processes of re-entry. Re-entry theorises how previously occluded meanings within a system are made visible and re-entered into the established meanings such that meaning shifts and changes but without radical discontinuity nor complete continuity (this will be developed further in the following Chapter II-1-B).

In this understanding, decadence becomes “a penelopean fabric that ‘seems to undo itself in the very process of its making’.”<sup>158</sup> By foregrounding the very processes in which meaning is made and unmade, the self-liquidation of decadent literature is no longer to be understood as a failure,<sup>159</sup> but rather as configuring the impossibility of establishing any form of definitive closure. The paradoxical process that decadence plays out culminates by questioning the very validity of its premises.<sup>160</sup> For example, Spackman demonstrates in her analyses how decadence cannot simply be understood in terms of an inversion of nature with art and artificiality, but rather, through a series of “interventions” “decadent aesthetics destabilises the very opposition between nature and artifice.”<sup>161</sup> Similarly, Potolsky explores how imitation in decadent narratives is not simply a literary strategy but also becomes explicitly and self-consciously thematised in a way that destabilises notions of copy and original.<sup>162</sup> Cultural saturation has indeed been identified as a recurrent trope in decadent literature. Dubois argues how “[l]e texte parle de texte, l’écrivain d’autres écrivains”<sup>163</sup> ([t]he text speaks of texts and the writer

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<sup>158</sup> Bernheimer, p. xvii.

<sup>159</sup> cf. Dubois, p. 380.

<sup>160</sup> Constable, Potolsky, Matthew, and Denisoff, p. 25.

<sup>161</sup> Spackman, p. 22.

<sup>162</sup> Matthew Potolsky, ‘Pale Imitations: Walter Pater’s Decadent Historiography’, in *Perennial Decay: On the Aesthetics and Politics of Decadence*, ed. by Liz Constable, Dennis Denisoff, and Matthew Potolsky (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 235–53 (p. 236).

<sup>163</sup> Dubois, p. 381.

of other writers). This therefore suggests a certain recursive process where texts are embedded in other texts. Dubois suggests, however, that because of this “[l]e roman est menacé d’atrophie”<sup>164</sup> ([t]he novel is threatened by atrophy). Similarly, Bernheimer discusses how Nordau could be understood to be himself the victim of his own diagnosis of “graphomania” among fin de siècle writers, the compulsion to “constantly scribb[l]e words about the words of others” and where “ideas are evidently suggested more by words than by things, by reading more than by experience.”<sup>165</sup> This cultural cumulation, the sense of saturation of images and texts and motifs from the past, is often conceptualised as a burden for creativity and as epigonism. Krobb, for example, distinguishes between the decadence texts that merely draw on the “the clichéd use of devices (images, stock figures, and so one), that are fashionably decadent to create a putrescent atmosphere”<sup>166</sup> and those that would instead create new and significant literature “generated out of ironic handling of stock themes.”<sup>167</sup> Bauer also discusses the process of cumulation:

Huysmans se contente de *cumuler*, d’orchestrer des motifs anciens et en fait déjà communs. Seul l’*amoncellement* de tels motifs, et l’application systématique avec laquelle ils sont développés restent dignes d’attention, ont valeur documentaire, peuvent nous révéler quelque chose sur le moment et l’époque.<sup>168</sup>

(Huysmans is content to merely *cumulate*, orchestrate ancient motifs that are in fact already common. Only the *accumulation* of such motifs, and the systematic application with which they are developed remain worthy of attention and have documentary value that can tell us something on the moment and the epoch.)

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<sup>164</sup> Dubois, p. 381.

<sup>165</sup> Bernheimer, p. 161.

<sup>166</sup> Krobb, p. 559.

<sup>167</sup> Krobb, p. 557.

<sup>168</sup> Bauer, p. 73 emphasis added.

Here, Bauer suggests that the process of cumulation itself is what is revealed to be meaningful rather than what is being cumulated. In this way, the foregrounding of the process of cumulation becomes itself a self-conscious strategy for (re)signification. This process of cultural cumulation, making visible the intertextual resources that are used to elaborate meaning and signification, becomes a strategy of recursion that highlights the very process of creative and meaningful elaboration. The process of cumulation is foregrounded, is “thematised,”<sup>169</sup> to make visible and self-conscious the process through which meaning develops. This configures cultural cumulation into a generative strategy that suggests a logic of repetition and variation in which the past becomes a diverse archival resource, a reservoir and cultural images and connotations, and therefore appears in “a system of diversity in contrast to the logic of absolute difference.”<sup>170</sup> The strategy of “fill[ing] the present with the past”<sup>171</sup> suggests both their similarity and difference and dissolves distinctions between the two. This self-conscious realisation is both debilitating, oppressive and liberating. Cultural cumulation is neither purely a mediation of a sense of saturation, exhaustion and cultural suffocation, nor a strictly productive process of innovation, but can rather be understood as destabilising and exploring notions of creativity as well probing the possibilities and limitations of the very process of making meaning. By making visible the process through which meaning is elaborated, decadence both opens up a sense of possibilities of signification, as well as highlights the suffocating weight of meaning (this will be explored further in close readings in Chapter III-2-C). An approach to decadence as playing out processes of (re)signification will therefore require theoretical

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<sup>169</sup> Potolsky, ‘Pale Imitations: Walter Pater’s Decadent Historiography’, p. 236.

<sup>170</sup> Spackman, p. 41.

<sup>171</sup> Bernheimer, p. 47.

resources and analytical methods for conceptualising and managing patterns of cumulation as meaningful and generative process of exploration and (re)signification.

Foregrounding the very process of meaningful elaboration enables a critical perspective through which different possibilities and options are explored and simulated. The point is to self-consciously open up the field of possible meaningful configurations. In this way, decadence can be understood as a process of articulation in which an array of resources is made visible in order to open up towards other possible ways of meaning. This is how discourse theory conceptualises the process of (re)signification, as process of articulation through which the possibilities of meaning in the field of discursivity are made visible through destabilisation and restabilised into new meaningful configurations. Decadence therefore can be conceived as a fundamentally liminal process playing out an array of semantic tensions and discursive interrelations. It emphasises processes of articulation through irritating irresolution and “structural ambiguity” by becoming a “stimulant that bends thought out of shape, deforming traditional conceptual moulds”<sup>172</sup> and foregrounding “a subjectivity in which the self recognises its own unknowability.”<sup>173</sup> As such, decadence is a stimulus for thought, a mode of knowledge, which enables a movement between perspectives and an openness of thought which would emphasise becoming, multiplicity and non-knowing.<sup>174</sup> This relates to how Nietzsche calls for inhabiting decadence and embracing decadence in order to overcome it.<sup>175</sup> The overcoming of decadence is not be understood in strictly oppositional terms as vanquishing a momentary deviance, but

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<sup>172</sup> Bernheimer, p. 166.

<sup>173</sup> Bernheimer, p. xv.

<sup>174</sup> Bernheimer, p. 27.

<sup>175</sup> Bauer, p. 81.

“as a perennial human condition”<sup>176</sup> through which different modes of being, and different options of meaning can be explored. The visibility of the process of (re)signification highlights the elaboration of meaning as contingent process of construction and therefore fosters a certain self-consciousness for exploring the different ways of meaning, being and living. Decadence will be overcome because it is a recursive process of generation, it will ultimately become refolded into itself in the processes of self-reference and self-differentiation, repetition and variation that it puts into play (this will be discussed further in analyses in Chapter IV-3 in the way in which decadence can be understood as re-entering into modernity in particular as well as into other concepts of the fin de siècle). In this way, “decadence is something that cannot be defined without that definition being promptly subverted [...] *by the movement of decadence itself*.”<sup>177</sup>

The discussions in this part of the chapter therefore highlight how the meaningfulness and significance of decadence can be productively conceptualised and analysed as process of (re)signification. Yet these approaches, whilst providing vital and incisive insights into particular unfoldings of decadence as process of (re)signification, do not always fully unpack in theoretical and methodologically explicit and flexible ways the process of (re)signification and meaningful elaboration. The critical insights into decadence as playing out processes of (re)signification can be combined with discursive and systemic approaches (as discussed in the first part of this chapter) in order to explicitly theorise and conceptualise decadence as dynamics of meaningful elaboration. The next chapter will discuss in more detail the approach

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<sup>176</sup> Potolsky, ‘Introduction’, p. viii.

<sup>177</sup> Corngold, p. 366 emphasis in original.



developed in this thesis which draws on, combines and reworks the critical insights discussed throughout Chapter I.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout this chapter, I discussed how decadence has recurrently been conceptualised as fundamentally ambiguous and liminal, and how this ambiguity and liminality has been problematic for research on decadence at the fin de siècle. The first part of this chapter (I-1) explored how issues of meaning and ambiguity recurrently preface studies of decadence at the fin de siècle. The ambiguity of decadence is often conceived in relation to the striking diffuseness of the term at the fin de siècle — it is notably widespread at this time and is deployed in a variety of different and sometimes contradictory ways. Decadence is therefore often configured as more suggestive than substantive. Scholars have addressed the diffuseness and suggestiveness of decadence at the fin de siècle by elaborating compilations of recurrent features of decadence, whilst others argue that the diffuseness and suggestiveness of the term precludes substantive approaches. Trying to define the elusiveness of decadence substantively is misguided; it should rather be approached as strategy, analysing how it functions rather than what it means. Bauer suggests a systemic approach in order to explore decadence functionally. Kafitz, on the other hand, suggests a discursive approach to address the remarkable diffuseness of decadence at the fin de siècle, however he deploys his discursive approach purely instrumentally, as method of

analysis that traces decadence substantively, rather than using discursive resources to theorise the discursive functioning decadence as discourse.

In the second part of the chapter (I-2), the ambiguity of decadence is linked to the particular semantic shift of the term at the fin de siècle in relation to the literary and artistic spheres, and to the acute shifts and reformulations taking place in fin de siècle culture more broadly. Decadence is therefore understood as fundamentally ambiguous in the way in which it straddles and interrelates different cultural spheres and scales, and how it is premised on fundamental tensions. Decadence is conceptualised as a crisis concept that relates to the sense of crisis at the European fin de siècle — it is understood as participating in some way in the reformulation and reevaluation of social and cultural values and practices. Decadence is conceptualised as both particularly significant in relation the literary production of the fin de siècle whilst also requiring to be understood in terms of broader cultural issues — it is relevant to the literary domain, but to be understood beyond the literary domain. Furthermore, the shift in meaning effected in the literary and artistic spheres is itself understood as relying on a tension in the way in which literary decadence is conceptualised in terms of protest, contestation and inversion. In order to analytically manage these ambiguous tensions and interrelations of decadence across disparate cultural spheres and domains, scholars usually conceptualised these tensions and interrelations dichotomously and separate out different aspects and strands of meaning.

In the third part of the chapter (I-3), the ambiguity of decadence is specified and reframed as liminality. In literary histories, decadence is recurrently analysed in relation to other literary movements and concepts of the fin de siècle, and is often conceived as effecting a transition towards modernity. Similarly, certain approaches to decadence in terms of theories of history and change theoretically reframe decadent liminality not as

a phase of transition, but as a dynamics of transition. Decadence can therefore be understood as playing out processes of change. This suggests a productive approach to theoretically reframing the fundamental ambiguities of decadence at the fin de siècle. However, remaining rooted in theories of history and change limits the potentials of this theoretical insight. Furthermore, since the ambiguity of decadence is primarily conceptualised as an issue of meaning and signification, the implications of the theoretical reconceptualising of decadence as performing a process and playing out a dynamics can more fully be realised by theorising decadence as process and dynamics of (re)signification.

In the final part of the chapter (I-4) I discuss certain ways in which decadence has been analysed as dynamics of (re)signification. In these analyses, the fundamental ambiguity and liminality of decadence is conceived as precisely what constitutes its significance and meaningfulness at the fin de siècle as a semantic force for exploration and reformulation of meaning. Despite this productive reframing of the ambiguity of decadence as process of (re)signification, these approaches do not always fully unpack in theoretical and methodologically explicit and flexible ways the process of (re)signification and meaningful elaboration. There is therefore a need to productively harness this fundamental ambiguity into a flexible, explicit and productive theoretical and methodological approach. Even though most critics recognise the ambiguity and instability of decadence, few incorporate these insights into a productive and explicit theoretical and methodological approach.

In the following chapter (Chapter II), I build on the critical insights discussed in this current chapter, and rework and combine them into an innovative theoretical and methodological practice in which decadence is conceptualised as process and dynamics of (re)signification. In such an approach, the issue of diffuseness and

suggestiveness of decadence (I-1) — that it is problematically widespread and elusive, more suggestive than substantive — is productively reframed through cumulative approaches to language and meaning. The elaboration of meaning in discourse theory is conceived as developing through processes of articulation in which the possibilities of meaning in the field of discursivity are made visible and articulated into different meaningful configurations. Furthermore, discourse theories of meaning conceptualise meaning in terms of cumulation and interrelation, of regularity in dispersion — meaning emerges from the cumulative interrelation and configuration of meaningful resources. Computational methods can visualise and re-present these meaningful patterns of statistical cumulation. The particular suggestiveness and diffuseness of decadence at the fin de siècle therefore points to how decadence can be understood as opening up the field of possibilities of meaning and enabling the realising of an array of configurations. These different patterns of cumulation and configuration can be traced through computational approaches. Through a combination of discursive and computational approaches to meaning, therefore, I can explore in what ways decadence is facilitating processes of (re)signification as well as the kinds of meaningful patterns that are configured. A discourse theory of meaning as articulation is also valuable for theorising the way in which decadence is linked to the reformulations and shifts taking place in the fin de siècle cultural landscape more broadly. As a time of crisis, the fin de siècle is making visible and opening up the possibilities of meaning in the field of discursivity that are being reformulated and negotiated in processes of articulation. A discursive approach to meaning therefore also provides theoretical resources to address the issue of how to theoretically conceptualise decadence as fundamentally interrelating an array of different cultural spheres, and in particular how to theoretically conceptualise the relations between

decadence as specific to the literary and artistic spheres as well as participating in broader debates. As a systemic and constructionist theory, discourse theory formalises the dynamic interrelations of intersections of complex phenomena within the frame of cultural practices of making shared social meaning. This discursive and systemic approach in which decadence can be considered as playing a particular semantic function enables us to understand decadence at a systemic and discursive level, as well as enables us to trace and explore how this strategy is deployed in particular contexts thus enabling us to balance the broad relevance and pervasiveness of decadence without compromising its richness and local particularities. Luhmannian systems theory conceptualises how the process of (re)signification unfolds through repetition and variation, through dynamics of self-reference and self-differentiation. This productively reframes issues of decadent ambiguity linked to the ways in which it is constituted of fundamental contradictory tensions, and issues of liminality which require decadence to be understood as unfolding a dynamics and a process. Aspects of decadent ambiguity and liminality when translated into systemic, discursive and computational approaches to meaning become productive analytical springboards. This suggests how decadence at the fin de siècle can be productively understood and explored as resources and strategies performing and exploring a plurality of possibilities of meaning in processes of (re)signification. In Chapters III and IV, I will explore how this theoretical and methodological reframing can be unfolded into particular analyses.

## **Chapter II**

### **Theoretical and Methodological Approach**

#### **Introduction**

In Chapter I, I discussed a key recurring issue in research on decadence namely, the fundamental ambiguity and liminality of the concept. Decadence is recurrently characterised as an elusive and ambiguous term, a concept that takes on many meanings across different contexts. This ambiguity can be linked to how decadence is a notably diffuse and widespread concept at the fin de siècle which makes it appear as more suggestive rather than substantive in the way that it can facilitate the expression of a plurality of different meanings yet remains difficult to substantively pin down (I-1). Another aspect of the ambiguity of decadence is how the concept spans across different cultural spheres and domains. Not only does the concept bring together and interrelate different cultural discourses into a variety of configurations, but it is also understood as participating across different levels of cultural phenomena — it is both seen as particularly imbricated in broad cultural and social phenomena as well as relevant in a different way to literary and cultural productions of the fin de siècle. Fundamental tensions fuel the instability of the concept of decadence (I-2). This points to how the ambiguity of decadence is fuelled by the fundamental liminality of the concept. Decadence can hold together and move between fundamental tensions, it

interrelates different levels and domains of thought, and it can be understood less as substantive concept in itself and more as enabling and effecting change (I-3). These aspects of decadent ambiguity and liminality can be productively addressed and harnessed by conceptualising decadence as providing resources and strategies for playing out processes of (re)signification and the exploration of different configurations of meaningful elaboration (I-4).

A recurring issue in research on decadence revolves around how to approach the meaning and significance of decadence as fundamentally diffuse, ambiguous and liminal. Reframed in theories of (re)signification however, the fundamental ambiguity and instability of the decadence is understood as precisely the source of its meaningfulness and significance as providing strategies and resources for destabilising and exploring meaning. Certain scholars recognise that the ambiguity at the core of decadence constitutes the fundamental meaningfulness of the concept, and develop analyses around this insight. Bauer in “‘Fin de siècle’ et ‘décadence’ comme catégories littéraires” (1975) calls for structuralist and systemic approaches to decadence that would focus less on the substantive features of the concept, and rather on its function and place within more or less broad(er) systems of signification and culture. This would enable us to understand decadence in terms of the shifting functions of the sign (decadence) within dynamic systems of signs.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Constable et al. and their contributors in *Perennial Decay* (1999) argue for an emptying out of the content and substance of decadence in favour of a focus on its strategies and procedures, on how it functions.<sup>2</sup> In this view, a recurrent focus on compiling lists of substantive features and

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<sup>1</sup> cf. especially Bauer, p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> Constable, Potolsky, Matthew, and Denisoff, pp. 11–13.

motifs stifles research on decadence which could be more productively considered in terms of textual strategies of destabilisation and exploration.<sup>3</sup>

Morley and Potolsky in the special issue “Forms and/of Decadence” in *New Literary History* (2004) also understand decadence in formalist terms (in line with Constable et al.), but they emphasise the liminal aspect of the concept of decadence as a dynamics of change.<sup>4</sup> In this approach, decadence offers strategies and resources (a repertoire of motifs and archive of images and echoes from the past) for exploring change.<sup>5</sup> Potolsky grounds these insights in terms of theories of history and historical change by emphasising that decadence is primarily a temporal concept.<sup>6</sup>

Bernheimer and Weir also combine formalist approaches with insights into the liminality fundamental to decadence by conceiving of the concept not just as a strategy but as a strategic and functional process. Decadence, according to Weir “is less a period of transition than a dynamics of transition,”<sup>7</sup> whilst Bernheimer argues that “[i]t is not the referential content of the term that conveys its meaning so much as the dynamics of paradox and ambivalence that it sets in motion.”<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, Bernheimer and Weir foreground the particular significance and meaningfulness of decadence as a process that destabilises meaning, as a process of (re)signification: “[u]ltimately, we shall see that the very elusiveness of the notion of decadence is significant; that is, elusiveness signifies meaning.”<sup>9</sup> Therefore, Bernheimer and Weir

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<sup>3</sup> Constable, Potolsky, Matthew, and Denisoff, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Potolsky, ‘Introduction’, p. v.

<sup>5</sup> Potolsky, ‘Introduction’, p. v.

<sup>6</sup> Potolsky, ‘Introduction’, p. vii.

<sup>7</sup> Weir, p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> Bernheimer, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Weir, p. 11.



ground dynamic formalist and functional approaches to decadence within theories of meaning and signification.

Whilst Constable et al. highlight the productivity of formalist approaches to decadence (considering it in terms of the strategies and procedures it enables), substantive approaches to decadence that compile lists recurring of features also suggest a relevant approach. By abstracting and compiling particular features that would relate to decadence across a variety of sources, these approaches can be understood more as cumulative rather than strictly substantive. Whilst there is often an emphasis on contextualised approaches to address the fundamental ambiguity of decadence, these cumulative approaches suggest how exploring overlaps and differentiations of patterns of cumulation across texts could also be a productive approach to addressing the ambiguity of decadence. Decadence is at one and the same time too diffuse and widespread, but also too localised and contextually loaded. A major hurdle therefore concerns how to reconcile the widespread circulation of decadence across broad cultural debates that exceed the literary domain with the specific significance of particular instances of decadence that facilitate and shape these broader debates and discussions. If the focus is on a limited set of instances and features, then the approach seems too reductive to explore the particular semantic force of decadence. If we expand to a broader context, however, then the particularity of decadence dissolves and slips away. Cumulative approaches can be a means of addressing these dilemmas. Kafitz in *Décadence in Deutschland* (2004) does recognise the value of cumulative approaches by arguing: “Entscheidend für die Ermittlung des Décadence-Diskurses ist nicht die Einzelaussage, sondern *die Addition*

*oder Kombination von Aussagen*"<sup>10</sup> (What is decisive for the investigation of the *décadence* discourse is not the single statement, but *the addition or combination of statements*). However, he does not operationalise this suggestion into a theorisation of *décadence* that would conceptualise meaning as patterns of distribution and configuration, of cumulation and interrelation.

In this chapter, I discuss how I combine and critically rework these critical insights into an innovative and explicit theoretical and methodological approach that would productively rather than reductively engage with the fundamental ambiguity and liminality of the concept of *décadence* on local and systemic levels. This approach would productively harness and incorporate the fundamental ambiguity and undecidability of the concept as a resource for the analysis of *fin de siècle* literature and culture. Systemic and discursive approaches promise to analytically trace and manage the elusive and teeming ambiguity of the concept, and to analytically interrelate local configurations with broader cultural patterns and phenomena. Constructionist approaches, such as discourse theory, provide theoretical tools that can facilitate approaches that articulate the intersections and interrelations of different cultural spheres and levels within the framework of theories of language and meaning. Luhmann's systems theory of signification and Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory provide theoretical means that are particularly relevant and useful for the conceptualisation of *décadence* as process of (re)signification at a time of crisis. Finally, discourse theory combined with computational approaches can develop a powerful approach to meaning as patterns of cumulation and configuration.

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<sup>10</sup> Kafitz, *Décadence*, p. 282 emphasis added.

In the first part of this chapter (II-1), I will introduce systems theory in general, and then focus on Luhmann's systems theory of communication in particular. These theories can help formalise how to keep in tension shifting contradictory aspects of complex phenomena. They are therefore particularly relevant for formalising processes of interrelation in dynamic networks of interconnected elements such as language. Furthermore, Luhmann provides a theorisation of (re)signification as playing out through recursive processes of paradoxical tensions between self-differentiation and self-reference.

In the second part of the chapter (II-2), I will discuss other systemic approaches that more specifically theorise language and meaning namely, the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe, as well as constructionist approaches to language and meaning more broadly. Discourse theory's notions of articulation and field of discursivity provide valuable theoretical resources for conceptualising the process of (re)signification in times of crisis and as interaction between different discursive domains. This theory therefore helps develop a more contextualising approach to the negotiation of meaning since discourse theory aligns with a constructionist approach to meaning. Constructionist approaches are relevant for providing theoretical resources to conceptualise how meaning functions as interconnected systems of social practices. A discursive approach to language therefore provides us with theoretical and methodological resources to conceptualise the dynamic processes of the elaboration of meaning in times of crisis through patterns of cumulation and interrelation.

In the third and final part of this chapter (II-3), I will discuss computational approaches to textual analysis. I will highlight the implications of working with computational tools that are particularly relevant to this project (but also broadly applicable). I will also discuss the particular computational methods of word frequency

and topic modelling that I use in this project and how these also align with and perform theoretical approaches to meaning as patterns cumulation of interrelation.

Computational approaches can therefore be a means to powerfully implement the theoretical premises of a discursive approach to meaning, particularly in the way in which computational methods can re-present statistical patterns of distribution across broad corpora of texts. Computational methods can also facilitate the oscillation between systemic, discourse-level perspectives and localised instances as well as instantiate defamiliarising and deforming analytical strategies that can play a role in the analytical process of exploration.

## **II - 1 - This Difference Which Is (Not) One: Systemic Theories of Language and Meaning**

### **II - 1 - A - Complex Systems Theories**

A recurrent feature in research on decadence is the fundamental ambiguity, liminality and tensions that are constitutive of the semantic force and meaningfulness of decadence at the fin de siècle. The drive underpinning this project is to develop a theoretical and methodological approach that would address and harness this productive elusiveness of decadence. An initial analytical hurdle in addressing the liminality and ambiguity of decadence is how to formalise and conceptualise the functioning of complex interrelating and conflicting dynamics.

One aspect of the approach suggested in this thesis is to focus less, at least initially, on *what* decadence means, and more on *how* it means, thereby shifting the focus away from substantive definition towards processes of meaningful elaboration and how these could reframe and shed new light on decadence at the fin de siècle. This theoretical reframing can stimulate alternative perspectives that open towards new analytical avenues. As discussed in the previous chapter (I-1), this shift in perspective towards function and strategy involves a form of emptying out and abstraction of decadence in order to explore how it functions as paradigm, the processes it stimulates and is involved in. Formalisation enables a useful epistemological shift away from the nature of the subject/object of investigation proper towards processes through which it is shaped and has effects. This allows to open up new ways of conceiving of the object/subject of study and can develop new ways of approaching and apprehending it.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, as discussed in the second and third parts of the previous chapter (especially in I-2 and I-3), decadence is a fundamentally liminal phenomenon that interrelates a number of different cultural domains. Decadence is therefore a dynamics that intersects and holds together different structural tensions and cultural spheres. To address this, an epistemological shift of abstraction and formalisation can be effected through theory, and, in this case, theorisation in terms of complex systems theory provide particularly useful theoretical resources for formalising and conceptualising the functioning of complex interrelating processes that generate shifting and undecidable phenomena.

Formalisation as a process of abstraction is a theoretical simplification that enables epistemological shifts in perspective and develops new ways of approaching

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<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Potter, *Representing Reality. Discourse, Rhetoric and Social Construction* (London, Thousand Oaks, CA., New Delhi: Sage, 1996), p. 7.

and apprehending phenomena. For example, it is through theoretical abstraction that insights from structural linguistics become integrated form structuralist approaches into the social sciences and literary studies. The theoretical translation of analytical insights from linguistics to literary studies enabled a formalisation of cultural phenomena as semiotic systems and opened up new analytical perspectives. Structuralist approaches in literary studies, for example, prompted the epistemological formalisation that “we are linguistic beings and that experience is so structured like a language that it qualifies as a language”<sup>12</sup> which paved the way towards new perspectives and approaches for exploring language, literature and culture and how these interrelate. Structuralism therefore introduces particular theoretical possibilities of abstraction that stimulate valuable epistemological shift in the analysis of cultural phenomena.

Saussure’s theory of language is often pinpointed as the theoretical impulse for structuralism.<sup>13</sup> Saussure’s major theoretical innovation was to problematise theories of language that assumed a natural and transparent relationship between word and the object/concept it designates, and instead locate meaning within language as a system. Meaning in Saussure’s theory could be conceptualised as arising from arrangements and self-differentiating relations between elements of language as system (*langue*). Signifiers are empty signs that take on an identity or meaning in their relationship of difference to other elements within the system of language. To understand an element of language, therefore, it must be placed within the system of signs. Individual elements and aspects of language can only be understood through their relation to

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<sup>12</sup> Andrew Cole, ‘The Function of Theory at the Present Time’, *PMLA*, 130.3 (2015), 809–18 (p. 810).

<sup>13</sup> Gunther Kress, ‘From Saussure to Critical Sociolinguistics: The Turn Towards a Social View of Language’, in *Discourse. Theory and Practice*, ed. by Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor, and Simeon J. Yates (London, Thousand Oaks, CA., New Delhi: Sage, 2001), pp. 29–38 (p. 30).

other elements and how these are situated within the entire system.<sup>14</sup> Saussure's theoretical reinterpretation of language can therefore be considered formalist and systemic. For Saussure, language is "form and not substance."<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, cultural phenomena in structuralism are formalised and explored functionally, through the relations that gave rise to them, rather than substantively. According to Jefferson, this enabled a shift in perspective in the human sciences: "it meant seeing forms of expression as signs whose meanings depend on conventions, relations and systems, rather than on any inherent features."<sup>16</sup> The problematisation of language as transparent medium in structuralism therefore provides a means to return to the text and its functioning as the meaningful unit of analysis. The structuralist method relies on the decomposition of systems of meaning into constitutive parts and mapping out how the parts relate to each other within these systems. In this type of analysis, the text is fragmented into units which enables formal analysis and a different perception of the text. Structuralism thus enables a shift of focus towards exposing and exploring the processes of elaboration of meaning, it is "a mode of thought (or 'poetics') which seeks less to assign completed meanings to the objects it discovers than to know how meaning is possible, at what cost and by what means."<sup>17</sup> Meaning is to be understood not substantively and authoritatively, but rather as emerging from "patterns of relationships inscribed in our culture, which may exceed the competence of any individual subject"<sup>18</sup> since "the object of its [the text's] reference is held to be not raw

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<sup>14</sup> cf. e.g. John E. Joseph, *Language and Identity: National, Ethnic, Religious* (Houndmills, England and New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 47–48; Kress, pp. 30–31; David Howarth, *Discourse* (Buckingham and Philadelphia, Pa.: Open University Press, 2000), p. 18.

<sup>15</sup> Howarth, p. 20.

<sup>16</sup> Ann Jefferson, 'Structuralism and Post-Structuralism', in *Modern Literary Theory: A Comparative Introduction*, ed. by Ann Jefferson and David Robey (London: Batsford, 1982), pp. 84–111 (p. 85).

<sup>17</sup> Jonathan D. Culler, *Barthes: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 66.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Moriarty, *Roland Barthes* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 122.

reality but other signs, pre-existing bodies of discourse.”<sup>19</sup> Structuralism is therefore a useful resource for researchers to conceptualise culture in terms of symbolic system which can facilitate structural analytical approaches of cultural formations.<sup>20</sup> This is effected in the way in which structuralism offers formalisation as a useful epistemological tool to reconceptualise meaning as abstracted relations of differentiation within a structure.

Abstraction and formalisation, however, can fall prey to reductive and totalising essentialism. The structure of relations that gives rise to meaning in structuralism is theorised as an underlying static and fixed theoretical structure which ultimately conceptualises meaning as a “product,” a closed structure, a fixed total system rather than a “process of production.”<sup>21</sup> The insights from the epistemological process of abstraction and formalisation as suggested by structuralism do not, however, necessarily need to lead to restrictive reduction and totalising approaches. Abstraction can also be a means for flexibly formalising complexity. Rather than fixed structure, abstraction as complex systems can formalise and hold together disparate intersecting elements at different scales. Even-Zohar, for example, argues that “a semiotic system can be conceived of as a heterogeneous, open structure.”<sup>22</sup> The poststructuralist revision of structuralism therefore preserves the productive formalisation of meaning as emerging from relations of differentiation, but addresses the limitations of structuralism by emphasising meaning as contextualised cultural practise thereby injecting notions of openness, play and dynamism into static structure.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Moriarty, p. 135.

<sup>20</sup> Howarth, p. 16.

<sup>21</sup> Howarth, p. 30.

<sup>22</sup> Even-Zohar, ‘Polysystem Theory’, p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Jefferson, p. 100; Potter, *Representing Reality*, p. 73.



Bakhtin is an important figure for post-structuralist theories of language which seek to rework insights from structuralism into a more contextually-grounded, dynamic and open approach.<sup>24</sup> Meaning for Bakhtin does not derive internally within the system of *langue*, but emerges from social processes of interaction, from a dynamic process of negotiation and reformulation.<sup>25</sup> In this approach, meaning emerges from the “accumulated dynamic social use of particular forms of language in different contexts and for different and sometimes conflicting purposes.”<sup>26</sup> The process of signification still, therefore, takes place through relations of differentiation, but these are social processes of negotiation that develop through tensions between accumulated use and innovative reformulation across different cultural spheres. Bakhtin uses the notion of “renting” to conceptualise this tension — we are renters of language, not owners.<sup>27</sup>

The elaboration of meaning can therefore be understood to take place through tensions between cumulation and innovation, stability and change. Processes of renegotiation and reformulation are subject to the twin influences of possibility and constraint, preservation and renewal. Conceptualising and exploring the process of signification therefore involves the tracing of these constitutive processes and interrelations:

The act of reading, theorists claim, plunges us into a network of textual relations. To interpret a text, to discover its meaning, or meanings, is to trace those relations. Reading thus becomes a process of moving between texts. Meaning becomes something

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<sup>24</sup> Janet Maybin, ‘Language, Struggle and Voice: The Bakhtin/Volosinov Writings’, in *Discourse. Theory and Practice*, ed. by Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor, and Simeon J. Yates (London, Thousand Oaks, CA., New Dehli: Sage, 2001), pp. 64–71 (p. 64).

<sup>25</sup> Maybin, pp. 64–65.

<sup>26</sup> Maybin, p. 65.

<sup>27</sup> James Wertsch, ‘The Multivoicedness of Meaning’, in *Discourse. Theory and Practice*, ed. by Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor, and Simeon J. Yates (London, Thousand Oaks, CA., New Dehli: Sage, 2001), pp. 222–35 (pp. 222–23).

which exists between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates, moving out from the independent text into a network of textual relations.<sup>28</sup>

In structuralist thinking, the structure of language could be pieced together simply by adding up its parts. Structuralist analyses worked on the assumption that the whole could be equated to the sum of its constituent parts. However, the insertion of the idea of dynamic interrelations complicates this. Firth argues, for example, that the putting together of parts is meaningful — the processes of interrelation and negotiation also need to be accounted for: “the collocation of parts, created meaning at least as much as what the individual parts contributed.”<sup>29</sup> Complex systems theories can provide theoretical resources for the formalisation of meaning as dynamic and complex interrelations and interactions of different constitutive elements that give rise to phenomena through tensions between possibility and constraint, cumulation and innovation, repetition and variation.

In theories of complex systems, phenomena under investigation are theorised as constituted of a multitude of various components that interact with each other in significant ways in dynamic networks of interaction. System theory theorises phenomena in terms of dynamics of interrelations: “Once elements (whether you look at particles, molecules or, indeed, humans) constrain each other in a context-sensitive way, they become inter-related and potentially inter-dependent; through their inter-relation, they have become a system.”<sup>30</sup> The focus in systems theory is not, at least initially, on determining the nature of particular elements that constitute the

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<sup>28</sup> Graham Allen, *Intertextuality*, 2nd edn (Abingdon, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Joseph, p. 56.

<sup>30</sup> Marcus Jenal, ‘Constraints and Emergence’, *Systemic Insight*, 2018 <<http://si-new.jenal.org/tag/enabling-constraints/>> [accessed 7 March 2019].

system, but on formalising and exploring the interrelations and intersections of elements within systems, thereby developing an insight into elements themselves, as well as understanding the systems of relations holistically, as a dynamic and systemic whole. These approaches therefore theorise systems as processes of interrelations and in doing so emphasise the *relations* between parts, the dynamics of the systems of relations as focus of analysis.<sup>31</sup> For example, in his polysystem theory, Even-Zohar operates a similar epistemological shift to that of structuralist thinkers and formalises cultural phenomena as “semiotic phenomena, i.e., sign-governed human patterns of communication (such as culture, language, literature, society).”<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, he claims that a particularly productive way of conceptualising these semiotic phenomena is to conceive of them as systems since systemic conceptualisation can open the way towards “a functional approach based on the analysis of *relations*” which facilitates a shift towards understanding how these phenomena interact and interrelate, how they operate in relation to one another, that would allow the development of new analytical perspectives.<sup>33</sup>

Even-Zohar’s polysystem theory is a systemic theory for understanding and conceptualising how literary texts function and circulate amongst other literary texts as well as across broader cultural contexts. Systemic approaches can therefore articulate local, particular instances with broader patterns of relations. Even though polysystem theory developed as a theory for literature, it “eventually strives to account for larger complexes than literature” and to reconnect literature to broader complexes of culture

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<sup>31</sup> Johanna Schmeer, ‘Xenodesignerly Ways of Knowing’, *Journal of Design and Science (JoDS)*, 2019 <<https://jods.mitpress.mit.edu/pub/6qb7ohpt>> [accessed 21 March 2019].

<sup>32</sup> Even-Zohar, ‘Polysystem Theory’, p. 9.

<sup>33</sup> Even-Zohar, ‘Polysystem Theory’, p. 9.

in which it participates.<sup>34</sup> A systemic perspective therefore allows to formalise interrelated phenomena and to move between different levels and aspects of these interrelations. Even-Zohar emphasises the productivity of a systemic perspective for analysis with his term *polysystem*: systems are always multiple, there are systems within systems and these interrelate and interact with each other but can also be understood as working together in a structured whole. Systems are therefore always to be understood as polysystems.<sup>35</sup> Systemic approaches are therefore fundamentally comparative and iterative since they involve movements and oscillations between different perspectives and scales of analysis, and are theoretically premised on the notion that phenomena are generated through reference and differentiation with other phenomena.<sup>36</sup> By focusing on and formalising the systems of relations, systemic approaches stimulate higher-level self-conscious perspectives that can identify and situate in relation to one another patterns of phenomena. Systemic theorisation is a theoretical vantage point from which to formalise and explore patterns of distribution and interrelation. A systemic approach therefore theorises phenomena as emerging from imbricated interrelations, and these interrelations can be traced and explored through an iteration and oscillation that moves between different scales and perspectives of analysis. The focus on the processes of interrelation in systemic approaches, rather than on the nature of the interrelated phenomena, emphasises the way in which systemic interrelations can give rise to phenomena that go beyond the simple addition of the elements within the system.

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<sup>34</sup> Itamar Even-Zohar, 'Introduction', *Poetics Today*, Special Issue Polysystem Studies, 11.1 (1990), 1–6 (p. 2).

<sup>35</sup> Even-Zohar, 'Polysystem Theory', p. 11.

<sup>36</sup> Marianne Jørgensen and Louise J. Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (London, Thousand Oaks, CA., New Delhi: Sage, 2002), p. 149.

The focus on the *dynamics* of interrelation between phenomena develops a theoretical perspective that goes beyond the nature of the elements within the system themselves and the simple addition of elements within the system. The simple addition of elements with other elements does not generate complex emergent phenomena, rather the dynamics of interrelation of elements is what generates complex emergent phenomena: “A complex dynamical system emerges when the behaviour of each molecule suddenly depends both on what the neighboring molecules are doing and what went before.”<sup>37</sup> A systemic view explores the holistic interrelating dynamics within systems and the effects that these dynamics engender — i.e. systems theories explore how complex and undecidable phenomena emerge through dynamic processes of interrelation and intersection that cannot be reduced either to the nature of the elements within the system themselves nor to the simple addition of elements within the system since these overlook the *dynamics* of the processes of interrelation. If we refer back to Chapter I as an example, in a systemic view Kafitz’s discursive approach as “die Addition oder Kombination von Aussagen”<sup>38</sup> (the addition or combination of statements) must be reconfigured as the addition *and* combination of utterances. To understand decadence as process of (re)signification, the dynamics that generate meaning must be understood — the constitutive utterances of decadence must be theorised not just in terms of their addition, but also in how these dynamically interrelate and intersect, how they form cumulative patterns of configuration.

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<sup>37</sup> Alicia Juarrero, *Dynamics in Action: Intentional Behavior as a Complex System* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1999), p. 139.

<sup>38</sup> Kafitz, *Décadence.*, p. 282.

A systemic view therefore theorises phenomena in terms of emergence which, at its most basic, is the idea that “[t]he whole is more than the sum of its parts.”<sup>39</sup>

Emergence is a theoretical term to describe the qualitatively novel patterns that arise out of the interactions between constitutive parts.<sup>40</sup> A phenomenon can be considered emergent when it can be considered to exhibit:

- (1) radical novelty (features not previously observed in the system);
- (2) coherence or correlation (meaning integrated wholes that maintain themselves over some period of time); (3) a global or macro “level” (i.e., there is some property of “wholeness”); (4) being the product of a dynamical process (it evolves); and (5) being “ostensive” (it can be perceived).<sup>41</sup>

Complex systems theories therefore aim to conceptualise and theorise how complex, undecidable and new phenomena emerge from dynamics of interrelation. In processes that seek to self-perpetuate and preserve the coherence of a system, novel phenomena can be perceived to emerge from the dynamics of interaction and interrelations of the elements within the system. In self-reproduction, combined effects can give rise to novelty through the interrelation of different elements within a system. Systems theory therefore explores how change, novelty and complexity can emerge through tensions between self-reference and self-differentiation, repetition and variation, cumulation and innovation. Meaning can be considered one such emergent phenomena, as discussed above in relation to Bakhtin. It emerges from complex

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<sup>39</sup> Hubertus Kohle, ‘The Wisdom of Crowds’, *On\_Culture: The Open Journal for the Study of Culture*, 2016, p. 3 <<http://geb.uni-giessen.de/geb/volltexte/2016/12072/>> [accessed 21 June 2016].

<sup>40</sup> Peter Corning, ‘The Reemergence of “Emergence”: Venerable Concept in Search of a Theory’, *Complexity*, 7.6 (2002), 18–30 (pp. 21–22).

<sup>41</sup> Corning, p. 22.

processes of interaction and interrelation that are subject to twin pressures of cumulation and innovation, stability and change, repetition and variation.

Theorising meaning and signification in a systemic perspective foregrounds the process of meaningful elaboration as a perpetual and shifting process that unfolds through cumulation and innovation, stability and change, repetition and variation. A systemic approach to meaning not only holds together the paradox of how novelty and change can emerge from self-reference, coherence and stabilisation, but also positions this tension as the generative force for the elaboration of meaning and signification itself. The notions of recursion or iterability conceptualise how meaningful elaboration unfolds through tensions between repetition and variation. Chomsky draws his concept of recursion from Humboldt's theory of language in order to theorise how potentially infinite realisations of language are possible through a finite set of means, "the infinite usability of the same syntactic rule."<sup>42</sup> A similar idea appears in Lévi-Strauss when he notes that myths seem to present a paradox. Myths appear as specifically particularised and pluralised, and yet also as exhibiting overarching echoes and similarities across world myths. Lévi-Strauss draws here a parallel with language which also appears as infinitely diverse whilst also seeming to present recurring universal characteristics.<sup>43</sup> The notion of recursion — how signification emerges from tensions between self-reference and self-differentiation, repetition and variation — is also detectable in Derrida's concept of iterability. Iterability conceptualises how signification is both necessarily repeatable and alterable.<sup>44</sup> Language cannot only be pure repetition

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<sup>42</sup> Marko Pajević, 'Sprachdenken: Thinking of Language (Humboldt / Trabant) and Its Anthropological Consequences', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 50.1 (2014), 97–112 (p. 98).

<sup>43</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'The Structural Study of Myth', *The Journal of American Folklore*, Myth: A Symposium, 68.270 (1955), 428–44 (p. 429).

<sup>44</sup> Howarth, p. 41.

(since this does not account for change), but neither can it be pure alteration (where signs could no longer be used and recognised in shared communication and social practice).<sup>45</sup> Meaning therefore is at one at the same time fundamentally repeatable, but also necessarily variable. Within iterability takes place the “mutually constitutive co-occurrence of the singular and the general.”<sup>46</sup> The signature, for example, is at once a unique sign from which stems its validity, but it also needs to be repeatable and recognisable.<sup>47</sup>

Systemic approaches can therefore be useful to articulate and hold together the local diversity and plurality of meaningful phenomena with the broad cumulative patterns of these combined phenomena. Furthermore, the notion of recursion highlights how signification is a perpetual process, it is autopoietic (i.e. self-creating, self-perpetuating) since there is no finality to the processes of repetition and variation. Meaning as systemic emergent phenomenon cannot be closed or finite “since it has no essence that could remain unaffected by the potentially infinite contexts (which are always contexts within contexts...) into which it could be grafted.”<sup>48</sup> Language is therefore “*undecidable*” as it is constantly invested anew.<sup>49</sup> Grigely, for example, coins the term “textualterity” to express the idea that art or language as they travel and circulate are in a perpetual “process of being unmade (as an object) and remade (as a text and as a memory).”<sup>50</sup> The ambiguity and liminality of decadence can be understood in terms of this “repeatable singularity.”<sup>51</sup> Decadence seems to be able to

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<sup>45</sup> Howarth, p. 42.

<sup>46</sup> Derek Attridge, ‘Introduction. Derrida and the Questioning of Literature’, in *Acts of Literature*, by Jacques Derrida, ed. by Derek Attridge (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 1–32 (p. 19).

<sup>47</sup> Attridge, p. 18.

<sup>48</sup> Attridge, p. 18.

<sup>49</sup> Howarth, p. 43.

<sup>50</sup> W.B. Worthen, ‘Drama, Performativity and Performance’, *PMLA*, 113.5 (1998), 1093–1107 (p. 1101).

<sup>51</sup> Attridge, p. 16.



generate from finite resources a plurality of different instantiations. The semantic significance of decadence is therefore how it can stimulate and play out processes of signification — decadence can be understood in terms of systemic processes of generation of meaning, and how it performs and plays out these processes of signification. The recursive processes of repetition and variation, constraint and possibility, cumulation and innovation that decadence plays out make the emergence of reformulation and change of signification possible. In Bakhtinian terms, meaning emerges from the tensions between centralisation and diversification. Language is imbricated in social systems, carries traces of the past, but is also open to change and innovation in every new utterance. The forces of centralisation (or “centripetal” forces) are conservative forces which seek to unify and fix language use. These forces seek to preserve and institute unified, coherent and culturally canonical ways of speaking. However, centripetal forces are in constant tensions with “centrifugal” forces which diversify and destabilise language into a variety of meaningful possibilities.<sup>52</sup>

Systemic theories therefore conceptualise complex phenomena (such as meaning) as emerging from systemic dynamics of interrelation and intersection that play out tensions between repetition and variation, self-reference and self-differentiation, cumulation and innovation. This allows me to theoretically formalise complex dynamics of change, processes that unfold through the interrelation of fundamental tensions and disparate domains. Discourse theories of meaning can further provide more specialised theoretical resources for conceptualising signification and as processes of cumulation and innovation (as will be discussed in the follow part of the chapter II-2). Meanwhile, Luhmann’s systems theory of communication can

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<sup>52</sup> Maybin, p. 65.

provide more concrete and specific theoretical resources for conceptualising the process of signification as unfolding through self-reference and self-differentiation, repetition and variation.

## II - 1 - B - Luhmann's Systems Theory of Communication

In his systems theory, Luhmann aims to theoretically reframe sociology by reformulating the approach to the analysis of society and social relations in terms of communication and information theory. Luhmann does not just add supplementary resources to the theoretical arsenal of sociology but “radically defined his object of study—“society”—as *communication*.”<sup>53</sup> Luhmann therefore posits that the basis for understanding and exploring social systems is communication and meaning — social systems can be understood as meaning and communication since social systems are primarily constituted through meaning.<sup>54</sup> Societies construct their self-understanding through language — self-experience and self-understanding can therefore be accessible through the analysis of manifest communicative acts.<sup>55</sup> Luhmann therefore aims to develop a “sociology of self-describing systems”<sup>56</sup> in which social systems are

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<sup>53</sup> Katja Mellmann, “‘Detoured Reading’: Understanding Literature Through the Eyes of Its Contemporaries (A Case Study on Anti-Semitism in Gustav Freytag’s *Soll Und Haben*)”, in *Distant Readings: Topologies of German Culture in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Matt Erlin and Lynne Tatlock (Rochester, N.Y. and Woodbridge, Suffolk: Camden House, 2014), pp. 301–32 (p. 309) emphasis in original.

<sup>54</sup> Niels Åkerstrøm Andersen, *Discursive Analytical Strategies. Understanding Foucault, Koselleck, Laclau, Luhmann* (Glasgow: Policy Press, 2003), p. 72.

<sup>55</sup> Mellmann, p. 309.

<sup>56</sup> Niklas Luhmann, ‘System as Difference’, *Organization*, 13.1 (2006), 37–57 (p. 56).

understood to construct their social reality and self-understanding through communication and meaning.<sup>57</sup>

Social systems can therefore be understood to observe, constitute and reinvent themselves through communication and meaning. Social systems are “autopoietic systems of communication, consisting in and by communication.”<sup>58</sup> Autopoietic systems are self-creating and self-perpetuating systems in the way that “they themselves create the elements they consist of, including the constitutive boundary between system and environment.”<sup>59</sup> “System” is the self-understanding of a social system as a system — a society brings itself into being by distinguishing what it is, its shared social reality (system) from other possible social realities (“environment”). Social systems as autopoietic systems generate their social reality through recursive processes of emergence: “The system creates itself as a chain of operations. The difference between system and environment arises merely because an operation produces a subsequent operation of the same type.”<sup>60</sup> The reality of the system is created by the system by selecting and reworking previous understandings: “Communication connects with previous communication and, in this sense, social systems arise in the recursivity of communication.”<sup>61</sup> In Luhmann’s systems theory, social formations emerge out of the way in which they elaborate meaning, social systems are formed in the way in which they develop a shared understanding, and this shared understanding emerges through recursive processes of repetition and variation, of self-reference and self-difference which is “an autopoiesis, a circular self-production.”<sup>62</sup> Systems therefore

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<sup>57</sup> Niels Åkerstrøm Andersen, p. 66.

<sup>58</sup> Niels Åkerstrøm Andersen, p. 63.

<sup>59</sup> Niels Åkerstrøm Andersen, p. 72, cf. also p. 75.

<sup>60</sup> Luhmann, p. 46.

<sup>61</sup> Niels Åkerstrøm Andersen, pp. 76–77.

<sup>62</sup> Luhmann, p. 46.

self-perpetuate, self-maintain, themselves through processes of incorporating variation and difference into self-reference, through recursive processes of repetition and variation, of possibility and constraint. Much of Luhmann's theoretical work can be understood to focus on developing theoretical models and resources for understanding this process of autopoiesis, how social systems "produce and reproduce themselves."<sup>63</sup>

The autopoietic stabilisation and destabilisation of systems therefore foregrounds how meaning is undecidable, unstable and always open to reformulation.<sup>64</sup> Luhmann conceptualises meaning as an actualisation within a field of different potentialities. The field of potentialities is not infinite but is recursively restricted to previous actualised meanings. Actualisation is a closing off of certain other potential actualisations of meaning that could have been brought about. Yet the actualisation exists only in relation to these other possibilities, as such: "meaning is the simultaneous presentation of actuality and potentiality. Meaning is the actual surrounded by possibilities; any actualisation of the moment potentialises new possibilities."<sup>65</sup> Meaning in Luhmann's systems theory is therefore fundamentally recursive in the way in which every actualisation shifts the potentialities of meaning and opens up towards new potentialities: "the core of the actualised disintegrates from the moment something has been indicated [...] Meaning is always reproduced (changed) recursively."<sup>66</sup>

Luhmann theorises in more detail how systems produce and reproduce themselves, how systems develop autopoietically, through the process of meaningful elaboration as self-reference and self-differentiation, repetition and variation. He initially

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<sup>63</sup> Shamus Rahman Khan, 'Theory of Society, Vol. 1, by Niklas Luhmann', *Shamus Rahman Khan*, 2013, p. 1 <[shamuskhans.files.wordpress.com/2013/11/khan-on-luhmann.pdf](http://shamuskhans.files.wordpress.com/2013/11/khan-on-luhmann.pdf)>.

<sup>64</sup> Niels Åkerstrøm Andersen, p. 72.

<sup>65</sup> Niels Åkerstrøm Andersen, p. 73.

<sup>66</sup> Niels Åkerstrøm Andersen, p. 74.

emphasises how meaning develops through relations of difference.<sup>67</sup> In order to stimulate a development, to instigate change, there needs to be something that generates some kind of distinction: “Draw a distinction, otherwise nothing will happen at all. If you are not ready to distinguish, nothing at all is going to take place.”<sup>68</sup> Change therefore develops through information, i.e. through something that was not known and that can now be known, through “a difference that makes a difference,” a difference that will bring about change in the system.<sup>69</sup> Luhmann, however, then turns to the mathematical theories of Spencer Brown developed in the *Laws of Form* (1969) in order to deconstruct how difference and distinction are premised on self-reference. He uses Brown’s mathematical notation for the “mark of distinction” (Figure 1 below)<sup>70</sup> to work through these ideas — a notation that makes apparent “the two aspects of the one mark”<sup>71</sup> in order to visualise the holding together, the refolding, of self-reference and self-differentiation into the recursive autopoietic process of production and reproduction.



Figure 1 Brown's "Mark of Distinction"

To distinguish is to mark something as different from something else.<sup>72</sup> In this way, “[e]very distinction is a boundary, the marking of a difference.”<sup>73</sup> A distinction indicates

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<sup>67</sup> Niels Åkerstrøm Andersen, p. 72.

<sup>68</sup> Luhmann, p. 43.

<sup>69</sup> Luhmann, p. 40.

<sup>70</sup> Luhmann, p. 41.

<sup>71</sup> Luhmann, p. 43.

<sup>72</sup> Luhmann, p. 43.

<sup>73</sup> Luhmann, p. 43.

something and shows how something else is distinct from it — this implies that the two things cannot be the same thing.<sup>74</sup> However, the distinction contains both the indication and the distinction — a distinction, in order to distinguish, has to indicate something it distinguishes from: “a distinction contains both a distinction and an indication and thus distinguishes between distinction and indication.”<sup>75</sup> Processes of differentiation and distinction therefore hold together indication and distinction into one articulation as in the notation in Figure 1. The distinction, by necessarily involving indication in order to mark what the distinction is distinct from, is premised on both indication and distinction. Therefore, the process of differentiation, of distinction, paradoxically reveals how the distinction could not be made between indication and distinction if distinction was not already present in the indication: “it becomes apparent that a hidden paradox had already been present at the beginning. This paradox is the distinction contained in the distinction.”<sup>76</sup> Consequently, the distinction makes visible the way in which it is already imbricated in the indication through the very process of distinction: “The distinction is extracted, so to speak, from the distinction. And, in the end, it is made explicit that a distinction had always already been present in the distinction.”<sup>77</sup>

In the distinction (when the distinction within the indication is made visible) the unmarked side of the distinction therefore becomes visible and can lead to reinterpretation of both sides.<sup>78</sup> This refolding of the distinction into indication is the process of re-entry. Re-entry (also a term taken from Spencer Brown) is the re-entering “of the distinction into the distinguished.”<sup>79</sup> The process of differentiation therefore

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<sup>74</sup> Luhmann, pp. 43–44.

<sup>75</sup> Luhmann, p. 44.

<sup>76</sup> Luhmann, p. 44.

<sup>77</sup> Luhmann, p. 44.

<sup>78</sup> Niels Åkerstrøm Andersen, p. 65.

<sup>79</sup> Luhmann, p. 48.

makes visible how difference is already present in self-reference and by making visible the already-present difference leads to reevaluation and reinterpretation of indication and distinction, of reference and difference.<sup>80</sup> Through re-entry, “[t]he distinction re-enters the distinguished,” and the paradox of distinction as already contained in distinction becomes dissolved in the process of reformulation, of re-entering the distinction within the distinction.<sup>81</sup> Meaning therefore exists in the tension between indication and distinction, between marked sides that derive their meaningfulness from unmarked sides, between actualisations that derive their meaningfulness from the excluded potentialities. Stabilised meanings can become destabilised and reformulated by making visible the unmarked side, the distinction, the field of potentialities that exist within, and which are then re-entered, refolded into the marked side, the indication, the actualisation in reformulation. Meaning emerges through recursive processes of self-reference and self-differentiation where destabilisation leads to reformulation and (re)signification in tension between repetition and variation.

The notion of re-entry is particularly useful in relation to this project. Luhmann has developed a model of systemic semantic change where meaning emerges from processes of self-differentiation and self-reference. Luhmann’s systems theory specifies further the recursive processes of emergence that hold in tension stabilisation and destabilisation, repetition and variation, through his concepts of autopoiesis and re-entry. The re-entering of marked and unmarked sides, of distinction into indicated distinction maintains a shifting stabilisation of systems of meaning — this articulates repetition and variation in terms of self-reference and self-differentiation. The system can maintain itself by constantly reincorporating self-differentiation within itself. This

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<sup>80</sup> Luhmann, p. 54.

<sup>81</sup> Luhmann, p. 54.

can yield particularly useful insights in relation to this project, which will be detailed further over the course of the following chapters, in particular by understanding decadence as playing out processes of re-entry (III-2-A), and as constituting the unmarked side of the distinction, the distinguished within the distinction (IV-3). As discussed in Chapter I, the dichotomised and oppositional approaches to decadence conceptualise the concept as

purely negative. It is a word chosen to fill a space. It emerges as the underside or logical complement of something else, coerced into taking its place in our vocabularies by the pressure of something that needs an opposite, an enemy. 'Decadence' is a scarecrow, a bogey, a red herring.<sup>82</sup>

Similarly, Kafitz argues that in the conceptual coupling illness and health, decadence is equated with illness in order to exemplify health *a contrario*.<sup>83</sup> A systemic approach to decadence as process of (re)signification enables me to reframe these ideas in terms of self-reference and self-differentiation rather than opposition and identity. Decadence functions as the underside, as the unmarked side, in order not to simply confirm the marked side but precisely to destabilise, to make visible, the potentialities of meaning in order to stimulate processes of reformulation. For example, the visibility of illness in relation to health in Nietzsche enables Nietzsche to re-enter illness into health in order to reconceptualise both these notions in processes of epistemological exploration (cf. Chapter III-2-A). Luhmannian systems theory of communication with its concept of re-entry therefore develops a more detailed theorisation of the systemic understanding

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<sup>82</sup> Gilman, p. 159.

<sup>83</sup> Kafitz, *Décadence*, pp. 282–83.



of emergent phenomena, of the systemic processes through which change emerges through tensions between repetition and variation, stabilisation and destabilisation.

In summary, system theories are relevant for this project in the way in which they formalise the dynamics of complex and interrelated phenomena. Systemic approaches hold in tension coherence and multiplicity by foregrounding processes and dynamics of interrelation in the way in which they allow to formalise and explore how complex phenomena emerge. In particular, meaningful emergent phenomena can be understood to emerge through tensions between cumulation and innovation, stability and change, self-reference and self-differentiation. Systemic theories can therefore allow to formalise dynamics of change and provide theoretical resources such as the concept of recursion to conceptualise processes of destabilisation and reformulation. Recursion and autopoiesis can hold together the conflicting tensions of emergent phenomena that unfold through continuity and change, repetition and variation. In particular, Luhmann's concept of re-entry allows me to conceptualise the process of (re)signification as unfolding through processes of self-reference and self-differentiation. Furthermore, systemic approaches to phenomena allow for an oscillation and movement between different levels, scales and lines of analysis. There are significant overlaps between systemic theories, discourse theory and computational approaches. Luhmann's systems theory of communication is constructionist (in the way that it conceptualises society as constituting itself through meaning) and systemic. Discourse theory is also constructionist (as will be discussed further in the following part of this chapter) and systemic — it also theorises the processes of (re)signification as unfolding through dynamics of cumulation, shifting actualisations or configurations in field of potentialities (articulation and the field of discursivity). Computational approaches to textual analyses also rely on theorisations of meaning as cumulation

and interrelation, as patterns of frequency and intersection. Furthermore, computational processes can support systemic movements between different levels and lines of analysis. This will be discussed further in the following parts of the chapter.

## **II - 2 - “Pluralise and Specify:”<sup>84</sup> Discursive and Constructionist**

### **Theories of Language and Meaning**

Systemic approaches can be fruitfully complemented by discursive approaches to processes of (re)signification. Discourse theory draws on systemic theoretical resources, but it also concretises systemic approaches by focusing explicitly on language and meaning — if systemic theories are useful for theorising complex dynamics of interrelation and interaction, discourse theory is useful for theorising the dynamics of interrelation and intersection of different cultural spheres in the process of reformulation and negotiation of meaning particularly in times of acute cultural crisis. This relates to one of the initial analytical hurdles in addressing the liminality and ambiguity of decadence namely, how to formalise and conceptualise the functioning of complex interrelations and intersections of cultural phenomena in times of acute crisis and transformation. Similarly to systemic theories, discourse theory effects a systemic formalisation and abstraction of dynamics of interrelation that unfold through tensions between possibility and constraint, repetition and variation, destabilisation and restabilisation, but it applies these specifically to language and meaning, and in

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<sup>84</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), p. 8.

particular to meaning in times of acute change and crisis. Discourse theory therefore helps address the ambiguity of decadence as crisis concept, as a term particularly imbricated with the *fin de siècle* sense of crisis, and how this relates to the way in which it permeates and interrelates different cultural spheres and discursive domains. Discursive approaches provide valuable resources for conceptualising in analytically manageable ways the interrelations between localised instances, particular cultural configurations, and systemic, discursive perspectives, broader cultural shifts and discussions. This is particularly relevant to decadence as a concept that is both widespread, discussed in generalising terms, but also culturally loaded and locally specific. In the words of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, the aim is to simultaneously “pluralise and specify”<sup>85</sup> the approach to decadence at the *fin de siècle*, to relate higher-level perspectives with particular renditions and configurations particular in the combination of discourse theories of meaning with computational methodologies (as will be discussed in the following part of this chapter, II-3).

This holding together of specificity and generality is facilitated by the constructionist theoretical stance that underpins discourse theory. In constructionist approaches to language, the elaboration of meaning is conceptualised as the foundational cultural practice for elaborating shared cultural and social reality. Similarly to Luhmann, analysing patterns of language are the gateway to exploring the social and cultural reality and self-understanding of the time. Constructionist approaches therefore provide theoretical resources for conceptualising the interrelations of different aspects of cultural and social materiality and reality through meaning. Therefore, in addition to the systemic conceptualisations of the process of (re)signification as

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<sup>85</sup> Kosofsky Sedgwick, p. 8.

unfolding through tensions between possibility and constraint, repetition and variation, self-reference and self-differentiation, the formalist theorisation of meaning in discursive approaches is re-ontologised as shared cultural reality that can be analysed through cumulative patterns of regularity in dispersion. Constructionist and discursive approaches therefore provide further resources to reframe decadent ambiguity in terms of processes of (re)signification.

## **II - 2 - A - Discursive Approaches to Language and Meaning: Discourse Theory**

In the previous part of this chapter (II-1), I discussed how general theoretical principles of systems theory contribute to the elaboration of the general theoretical foundations of the approach developed in this thesis, whilst the more concrete approaches by Luhmann provided more specific and detailed theoretical and methodological resources for exploring decadence as stimulating and performing processes of (re)signification. Similarly to discourse approaches, the general theoretical foundations of the approach to decadence in this thesis as process of (re)signification draw on general principles of discursive approaches to language and meaning, whilst the particular discursive approach of discourse theory by Laclau and Mouffe provide more specific and concrete theoretical resources.

In elaborating discourse theory, Laclau and Mouffe combine structuralist theory, Foucauldian theoretical premises with hermeneutical and Marxist thought in order to

develop their own social constructionist approach to discourse analysis.<sup>86</sup> They preserve from structuralism the conceptualisation of meaning and signification as emerging from relations of difference between elements within a system of signs.<sup>87</sup> However, the influence of Foucauldian and Marxist approaches broaden the static structure of differences to a dynamics of cultural practices in which the social world appears “as a web of processes in which meaning is created.”<sup>88</sup> Signification in discourse theory is a cultural and social practice in which conventions, negotiations and struggles within and across different social and cultural contexts shape, fix, perpetuate and transform structures of shared cultural reality.<sup>89</sup> The elaboration of meaning is conceptualised as processes of negotiations and reformulations through which the foundations of shared social and cultural reality are contingently established.<sup>90</sup> The process of meaningful elaboration is a dynamics of interrelations and negotiations that struggle towards a partial fixation of meaning by fixing signs in relation to one another “as if a Saussurian structure existed.”<sup>91</sup> The meaning of social phenomena can therefore be analysed by exploring the relations between constitutive elements within the system of signs.<sup>92</sup> Social phenomena are meaningfully constituted through systems of relations and differences that position social phenomena in relation to one another — the social world is made meaningful through these relations of difference.<sup>93</sup>

In discourse theory, shifting dynamics destabilise and restabilise meaning into contingent meaningful constructions. Meaning is perpetually renegotiated at the

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<sup>86</sup> Howarth, p. 10; Jørgensen and Phillips, p. 24.

<sup>87</sup> Howarth, p. 10.

<sup>88</sup> Jørgensen and Phillips, p. 25.

<sup>89</sup> Jørgensen and Phillips, p. 25.

<sup>90</sup> Jørgensen and Phillips, pp. 25–26.

<sup>91</sup> Jørgensen and Phillips, p. 25 emphasis in original.

<sup>92</sup> Howarth, p. 11.

<sup>93</sup> Howarth, pp. 101–2.

juncture of stabilising forces necessary for developing a shared social meaning, and destabilising forces which expose the contingency of stability and suggest other possibilities of meaning. In discourse theory, this perpetual process of destabilisation and restabilisation of meaning is termed “articulation.”<sup>94</sup>

An articulation is a hookup, a temporary linkage, a forged connection between two or more elements. It is a contingent link between phenomena that do not share a unifying or essential identity and one that is unmade and remade over time.<sup>95</sup>

Articulation is the process and struggle through which *elements* or *floating signifiers* are transformed into *moments* or *nodal points* by reducing the potential polysemy of *elements/floating signifiers* to a contingent fixed meaning. *Elements/floating signifiers* are positioned and interrelated into particular configurations that temporarily constitute their meaning into *moments*.<sup>96</sup> The contingent configurations of meaning stabilised into *moments* through articulation establish a certain understanding of social reality, but the stability of *moments* is always in tension with the surplus of excluded meaningful possibilities in the *field of discursivity*, even if a particular historical moment is dominated by certain sets of discourses that appear uncontested and natural.<sup>97</sup> The field of discursivity can be understood as the “discursive ‘outside’,” the unmarked side of meaning that is necessary for the elaboration of the marked side, i.e. the contingent stabilisation of meaning into a particular configuration.<sup>98</sup> Stabilised meaning is therefore articulated into contingent meaningful configurations through the selection and

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<sup>94</sup> Howarth, p. 109; Jørgensen and Phillips, p. 28.

<sup>95</sup> Rita Felski, ‘Modernist Studies and Cultural Studies: Reflections on Method’, *Modernism/Modernity*, 10.3 (2003), 501–17 (p. 511).

<sup>96</sup> Jørgensen and Phillips, pp. 26–29.

<sup>97</sup> Niels Åkerstrøm Andersen, p. 51; Howarth, p. 103; Jørgensen and Phillips, p. 47.

<sup>98</sup> Howarth, p. 103.

interrelation of an array of potential meaning in the field of discursivity.<sup>99</sup> The field of discursivity theoretically conceptualises the array of possibilities that are excluded in the fixation of meaning in *moments* — it is surplus meaning, other potential ways of relating signs and fixing meaning, a theoretical space which holds all potential possibilities for meaningful configuration.<sup>100</sup> However, “in discourse theory it is not entirely clear if the field of discursivity is a comparatively unstructured mass of all possible constructions of meaning or if it is itself structured by the given competing discourses.”<sup>101</sup> The theoretical notion of field of discursivity does not address how different potential meanings are more or less likely and possible compared to other potential meanings. The actualisation of meaningful configurations in articulation can shift the window of probability of certain potential meaningful resources in the field of discursivity. Jørgensen and Phillips point to Fairclough’s notion of order of discourse as more a theoretically precise term for delimiting the more relevant possibilities within all possibilities.<sup>102</sup> This theoretical distinction and precision is important to note here in the discussion of the theoretical framework that underpins the approach to decadence developed in this thesis (cf. discussions in the concluding paragraph of this section II-2-A). However, distinctions between order of discourse and field of discursivity are not a methodological necessity for the analyses in this project — I will therefore be using Laclau and Mouffe term of field of discursivity throughout the thesis.

Times of cultural and social crisis are understood in discourse theory as times when the contingency of the stabilised articulations of meaning becomes particularly

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<sup>99</sup> Niels Åkerstrøm Andersen, p. vi.

<sup>100</sup> Jørgensen and Phillips, p. 27.

<sup>101</sup> Jørgensen and Phillips, p. 27.

<sup>102</sup> Jørgensen and Phillips, p. 27.

visible and contested.<sup>103</sup> Times of crisis are times of particularly intense articulation in which stabilised meaningful configurations are destabilised, and there are widespread struggles over and explorations of new meaningful configurations.<sup>104</sup> Discourse theory is therefore particularly suited to analyses of times of crisis since these are moments when the process of articulation is particularly salient. The fin de siècle can therefore be theoretically understood as a time of crisis in which previous meaningful configurations are destabilised and new meaningful explorations are explored.

Discourse theory therefore provides theoretical resources that are particularly relevant to exploring times of intense articulation such as the fin de siècle. Decadence is understood as participating in these processes of articulation — as opening up the field of discursivity, as providing a repertoire of motifs, resources and strategies that open up meaningful possibilities which can then be explored and articulated into different meaningful configurations. Decadence can therefore be understood as a destabilising force across a number of different discourses which opens up the field of discursivity, the excluded possibilities of meaning, as resource in the process of articulation and reconfiguration. Discourse theoretical notions of articulation and field of discursivity are similar to Luhmann's process of re-entry in which unmarked sides are made visible through distinction (similar to the field of discursivity as field of meaningful possibilities) which leads to a reformulation of the mark and unmarked sides (the process of articulation). However, whilst Luhmann's theory is useful for conceptualising the tensions between self-reference and self-differentiation, repetition and variation through which the process of meaningful signification unfolds, in discourse theory, the notions of articulation and field of discursivity theorise processes of (re)signification

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<sup>103</sup> Jørgensen and Phillips, p. 47.

<sup>104</sup> Howarth, p. 110.



more in terms of processes of cumulation and interrelation, of liberation and constraint. In the process of articulation, stabilised meaning is destabilised and alternative meaningful possibilities are exposed and made visible in the open field of discursivity. However, as discussed in relation to Fairclough's notion of order of discourse,<sup>105</sup> the field of possibilities of meaning is only theoretically completely open, and in practice it is restricted and constrained by the widow of shared meaningful possibilities, the centripetal forces of Bakhtin.<sup>106</sup> The field of discursivity is a repertoire or archive of possibilities and potentialities that is shaped by accumulated cultural meaningful resources, and articulation can generate new meaningful configurations by interrelating, arranging these accumulated discursive resources into different configurations. In discourse theory, there is therefore a tension in the process of (re)signification between liberation and constraint, cumulation and interrelation or configuration. Meaningful patterns emerge at the juncture between open possibilities, dispersion of possibilities, and the configuration and arrangement of these possibilities into cumulative patterns. Computational methods can help explore and re-present these cumulative patterns of distribution and interrelation (as will be discussed in II-3). A discursive theoretical approach to meaning therefore conceptualises broad cultural and social shifts through the practices of meaningful elaboration that explore and constitute these shifts and reformulations. Discourse theory as a constructionist approach to language and meaning can therefore help theorise shifts in language as shifts in meaningful cultural practices which opens up new perspectives on how to explore the relations between particular textual practices of literary decadence and the broader social and cultural practices of meaningful elaboration.

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<sup>105</sup> Jørgensen and Phillips, p. 27.

<sup>106</sup> Maybin, p. 65.

## II - 2 - B - Discursive Approaches to Language and Meaning:

### Constructionism

Discourse analysis is a relatively new tradition of research, however, theories and philosophies of language going back to the early twentieth century and beyond have been crucial in paving the way for discursive approaches.<sup>107</sup> According to Paltridge, Zellig Harris was the first to introduce the term “discourse analysis” in 1952. Harris understood discourse analysis as a method for analysing connected speech or writing — he wanted to go further than linguistic examinations of elements in language, and wanted to extend his material beyond the sentence. He was also particularly interested in the relations between linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour. His most detailed examinations, however, remained centred on the first of his interests as he tried to develop a way “for describing how language features are distributed within texts and the ways in which they are combined in particular kinds and styles of texts.”<sup>108</sup> Even since its inception, discourse analysis has sought to develop ways of approaching language and texts that explore how language and texts make meaning, how they become meaningful<sup>109</sup> by exploring “patterns of language across texts as well as the social and cultural contexts in which the texts occur.”<sup>110</sup> Subscribing to discourse

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<sup>107</sup> Margaret Wetherell, ‘Debates in Discourse Research’, in *Discourse. Theory and Practice*, ed. by Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor, and Simeon J. Yates (London, Thousand Oaks, CA., New Dehli: Sage, 2001), pp. 380–99 (pp. 381–82).

<sup>108</sup> Brian Paltridge, *Discourse Analysis: An Introduction* (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 2.

<sup>109</sup> Paltridge, p. 3.

<sup>110</sup> Paltridge, p. 1.

analysis therefore signals a certain approach which is concerned with “the meaning- and value-producing practices in language rather than simply the relationship between utterances and their referents.”<sup>111</sup> Discourse analysis therefore follows in the same tradition of theories of language and meaning that problematises language as transparent. For example, in his *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), Wittgenstein proposed that language is constitutive rather than reflective.<sup>112</sup> Meaning does not emanate from the mind, nor from the world, but is constructed through “language games.” This shifts the focus away from language as mediation and abstraction and towards exploring language as a social practice deployed in specific contexts of use.<sup>113</sup>

Discourse analysis is not a unified field of research around a uniform theory and methodology. Rather, discourse analysis is constituted of a plurality of different styles, traditions and approaches,<sup>114</sup> it is a motley “tapestry of ideas and speculations about language.”<sup>115</sup> Different traditions have different analytical interests, theoretical frameworks and backgrounds, and methodological and interpretative strategies. The first task in a discursive project is to identify the theories and methodologies that are most relevant to the particular research at hand. Different discourse analytical traditions include: feminist linguistics (developed by Deborah Cameron and Jennifer Coates in late 80s and 90s), conversational analysis and ethnomethodology (key figures include

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<sup>111</sup> Michael Shapiro, ‘Textualizing Global Politics’, in *Discourse. Theory and Practice*, ed. by Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor, and Simeon J. Yates (London, Thousand Oaks, CA., New Delhi: Sage, 2001), pp. 318–23 (p. 320).

<sup>112</sup> Margaret Wetherell, ‘Part One: Foundations and Building Blocks. Editor’s Introduction.’, in *Discourse. Theory and Practice*, ed. by Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor, and Simeon J. Yates (London, Thousand Oaks, CA., New Delhi: Sage, 2001), pp. 9–13 (p. 11); Jonathan Potter, ‘Wittgenstein and Austin’, in *Discourse. Theory and Practice*, ed. by Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor, and Simeon J. Yates (London, Thousand Oaks, CA., New Delhi: Sage, 2001), pp. 39–46 (p. 40).

<sup>113</sup> Potter, ‘Wittgenstein and Austin’, p. 41.

<sup>114</sup> cf. e.g. Paltridge, p. 8.

<sup>115</sup> Wetherell, ‘Part One: Foundations and Building Blocks. Editor’s Introduction.’, p. 9.

Goffman and Garfinkel), critical discourse analysis (CDA) and critical linguistics (developed by Norman Fairclough, Teun van Dijk and Ruth Wodak, also in the late 80s and 90s), discourse psychology (key figures include Margaret Wetherell and Jonathan Potter), and discourse theory (developed by Laclau and Mouffe).<sup>116</sup> Narrative analysis can also be included since it explores the construction and formulation of events, or life history or identity in language.<sup>117</sup> Recurring issues can however be considered to thread these different approaches and traditions together. These include issues of how to conceptualise meaning, how to conceptualise the relationship between discourse and reality — i.e. to what extent does discourse constitute social reality — and the extent of human agency in meaning-making practices.<sup>118</sup> The variation between different traditions of discourse analysis can be understood in terms of positions taken in relation to these issues and questions, and in terms of the aim and focus of the particular analytical project. Different traditions and approaches are more or less compatible and overlapping, and there is generally an openness to combining approaches so long as the resultant framework is coherent and the mixed approaches are translated in a way that can resolve conflictual and incompatible epistemologies.<sup>119</sup> Discourse research therefore encourages multi-perspectivism — different approaches

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<sup>116</sup> Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor, and Simeon J. Yates, 'Introduction', in *Discourse. Theory and Practice*, ed. by Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor, and Simeon J. Yates (London, Thousand Oaks, CA., New Delhi: Sage, 2001), pp. 1–8 (pp. 6–7); Wetherell, 'Part One: Foundations and Building Blocks. Editor's Introduction.', pp. 9–11; Margaret Wetherell, 'Part Four: Culture and Social Relations. Editor's Introduction.', in *Discourse. Theory and Practice*, ed. by Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor, and Simeon J. Yates (London, Thousand Oaks, CA., New Delhi: Sage, 2001), pp. 284–93 (p. 285); Jørgensen and Phillips, p. 7.

<sup>117</sup> Wetherell, Taylor, and Yates, pp. 6–7.

<sup>118</sup> Wetherell, 'Part One: Foundations and Building Blocks. Editor's Introduction.', p. 10.

<sup>119</sup> Wetherell, 'Debates in Discourse Research', p. 383.

offer different understandings which together can generate a richer perspective on the phenomena under study.<sup>120</sup>

Despite the variations across different discourse research traditions, all are underpinned by a constructionist theoretical foundation (although they vary in the degree to which they subscribe to constructionism). Constructionism can be understood as theoretical and philosophical stance from which flows a number of different positions and traditions, and discourse analysis is one of the main approaches within constructionist theory.<sup>121</sup> Constructionism holds as its basic claim that language plays a fundamental role in the construction of shared social reality. The main assumption is that language is constitutive of cultural reality.<sup>122</sup> (Constructionism is a theory of meaning and knowledge that conceptualises meaning-making as a formalising process which translates experiences into models of (social) life that become widely shared and found the basis for communal social life. The creating of models for social life and the sharing of these models takes place through language. Therefore, social constructionist projects explore “the development of jointly constructed understandings of the world that form the basis for shared assumptions about reality.”<sup>123</sup> In constructionist approaches, therefore, language is the foundational cultural practice through which different aspects of social and cultural reality can be explored. Constructionism therefore ascribes a particular role to language as the

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<sup>120</sup> Jørgensen and Phillips, p. 4.

<sup>121</sup> Jørgensen and Phillips, p. 4.

<sup>122</sup> Margaret Wetherell, ‘Themes in Discourse Research: The Case of Diana’, in *Discourse. Theory and Practice*, ed. by Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor, and Simeon J. Yates (London, Thousand Oaks, CA., New Dehli: Sage, 2001), pp. 14–28 (p. 16).

<sup>123</sup> W. Leeds-Hurwitz, ‘Social Construction of Reality’, ed. by S. Littlejohn and K. Foss, *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory* (London, Thousand Oaks, CA., New Dehli: Sage, 2009), pp. 892–95 (p. 892).

foundational process and practice of meaningful elaboration — the cultural practice through which reality is made meaningful and shared:

our access to reality is always through language. With language, we create representations of reality that are never mere reflections of a pre-existing reality but contribute to constructing reality. That does not mean that reality itself does not exist. Meanings and representations are real. Physical objects also exist, but they only gain meaning through discourse.<sup>124</sup>

Language is not a reflective medium, but a generative meaning-making practice that constructs cultural reality — language is not a transparent reflection or mediation of an underlying reality rather, language is a cultural practice that actively constitutes social reality and shapes our understanding of the social world.<sup>125</sup> Our reality and shared social world is only accessible through meaning, and meaning is constructed primarily through language therefore shared cultural and social reality is accessible through its meaningful configurations and representations in language — constructionism is a theoretical position that foregrounds the elaboration of meaning through language as key to understanding our social reality.<sup>126</sup> Cultural reality is constructed through the processes of meaningful elaboration through which we construct shared truths and negotiate the foundations of social reality and behaviour.<sup>127</sup> Reality is made and constructed through discursive and representational practices.<sup>128</sup> Discourse is the term usually used to refer to this conceptualisation of language as constitutive cultural

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<sup>124</sup> Jørgensen and Phillips, pp. 8–9.

<sup>125</sup> Wetherell, 'Themes in Discourse Research: The Case of Diana', p. 16; Hugh Mehan, 'The Construction of an LD Student: A Case Study in the Politics of Representation', in *Discourse. Theory and Practice*, ed. by Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor, and Simeon J. Yates (London, Thousand Oaks, CA., New Delhi: Sage, 2001), pp. 345–63 (p. 360); Wetherell, 'Debates in Discourse Research', p. 392.

<sup>126</sup> Wetherell, 'Themes in Discourse Research: The Case of Diana', p. 16.

<sup>127</sup> Jørgensen and Phillips, p. 5.

<sup>128</sup> Wetherell, 'Part Four: Culture and Social Relations. Editor's Introduction.', p. 289.

practice of meaningful elaboration. The process of elaborating discursive formations is understood as an activity (i.e. discourse is social practice). This activity involves the construction of reality out of the ambiguity by means of discursive construction guided by cultural practices.<sup>129</sup>

In a constructionist and discursive approach, therefore, foundational aspects of social and cultural reality and self-understanding (such as cornerstones of identity e.g. nationality, class, race, gender) are no longer understood as givens but as constructed in social processes of interaction, in cultural practices of meaningful elaboration.<sup>130</sup> Our understanding of our selves and the world is elaborated through shared discursive resources and practices — selves, objects in the world, reality are not inherently meaningful but are made meaningful through processes of signification that makes those subject, objects and realities apparent and available in our store of common and shared understanding.<sup>131</sup> The focus in constructionist analyses therefore is not on uncovering or determining the nature of the objects/subjects/phenomena themselves, on uncovering an underlying reality, but rather on understanding the processes through which these different objective/subjects/phenomena, these different versions of reality, are created, constituted and made real through meaningful practices, and how they compete for legitimacy.<sup>132</sup> Constructionists focus on the process by which phenomena take on meaning for us socially and culturally.<sup>133</sup> The premise of constructionist analyses is to formalise and explore the ways in which processes of meaningful

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<sup>129</sup> Mehan, p. 360.

<sup>130</sup> Joseph, pp. 83–84.

<sup>131</sup> Margaret Wetherell, 'Part Three: Minds, Selves and Sense Making. Editor's Introduction.', in *Discourse. Theory and Practice*, ed. by Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor, and Simeon J. Yates (London, Thousand Oaks, CA., New Delhi: Sage, 2001), pp. 186–97 (p. 187); Jørgensen and Phillips, p. 102.

<sup>132</sup> Niels Åkerstrøm Andersen, p. ix.

<sup>133</sup> Potter, *Representing Reality*, p. 7.

elaboration unfold — constructionist approaches are formalist and functional approaches to meaning in the focus on processes and practices of meaningful elaboration.<sup>134</sup> This functional and formalist approach “entails a theoretical shift from the primacy of ontology to the primacy of epistemology.”<sup>135</sup> Epistemological approaches (or what I referred to in II-3 as formalist and functional approaches) empty out ontology, they de-ontologise and de-essentialise their object of study, in order to explore how phenomena emerge and are shaped.<sup>136</sup> Reality is not pre-given, presupposed or pre-constituted in an epistemologically-focussed approach, rather the ontology of reality is limited “to only saying ‘reality is’” in order to focus on how reality is constituted through processes of meaningful elaboration.<sup>137</sup>

In discourse theory Laclau and Mouffe subscribe to a strong version of constructionism — all phenomena, all cultural and social realities, are meaningfully constituted through discursive processes. The social and cultural world is exclusively apprehended and filtered through discourse as process of meaningful elaboration.<sup>138</sup> Laclau and Mouffe thereby deconstruct the distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices.<sup>139</sup> Cultural phenomena do not have an “‘extra-discursive’ *meaning*” although they may have a physical existence outside of discourse.<sup>140</sup> Physical reality independent of social processes of meaning can exist, but for human beings, social reality supersedes physical reality.<sup>141</sup> All elements that constitute our reality are meaningful to us through discourse, through processes and practices of

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<sup>134</sup> Wetherell, ‘Themes in Discourse Research: The Case of Diana’, p. 17.

<sup>135</sup> Niels Åkerstrøm Andersen, p. xi.

<sup>136</sup> Niels Åkerstrøm Andersen, p. xiii.

<sup>137</sup> Niels Åkerstrøm Andersen, pp. xii–xiii.

<sup>138</sup> Jørgensen and Phillips, p. 19.

<sup>139</sup> Howarth, pp. 104, 116.

<sup>140</sup> Howarth, p. 104.

<sup>141</sup> Jørgensen and Phillips, p. 35.



meaningful elaboration. We access social and physical realities through “systems of meaning in the form of discourses,” social and physical objects are invested with meaning through discursive processes of signification.<sup>142</sup> Discourse theory is therefore a constructionist theoretical and methodological practice of analysing cultural phenomena (whether texts or event or institutions or policies, and so on) as discursive processes of meaningful elaboration by using a range of textual methods of analysis.<sup>143</sup> Laclau and Mouffe use just one analytical approach to analyse all aspects of cultural moments. All cultural phenomena can be read in terms of practices of signification, can be theorised and analysed as text and textuality.<sup>144</sup> Textualisation does not mean reducing social reality to linguistic expression, but is a theoretical formalisation of cultural phenomena that opens up epistemological and analytical perspectives:

To textualize a domain of analysis is to recognize, first of all, that any ‘reality’ is mediated by a mode of representation and, second, that representations are not descriptions of a world of facticity, but are ways of making facticity. Their value is thus not to be discerned in their correspondence with something, but rather in the economies of possible representations within which they participate.<sup>145</sup>

This therefore opens up new epistemological and analytical possibilities for analysing cultural phenomena in terms of the meaningful processes through which they are constituted, for shifting the focus on the processes that construct meaningful representations and configurations. A strong constructionist approach, such as in discourse theory, therefore collapses the analytical distinctions between different

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<sup>142</sup> Jørgensen and Phillips, p. 35.

<sup>143</sup> Howarth, p. 10.

<sup>144</sup> Peter Burke, ‘Strengths and Weaknesses of Cultural History’, *Cultural History*, 1.1 (2012), 1–13 (p. 4).

<sup>145</sup> Shapiro, p. 320.

cultural practices and cultural spheres and domains: “These concepts of text and textuality have enabled cultural theorists to challenge the assumed separation of an empirically available, non-linguistic material world from its representations in linguistic and non-linguistic (for instance visual) texts.”<sup>146</sup> Cultural and social realities and experiences are constituted and exist through meaningful discursive constructions, through practices and processes of meaningful representation and configuration. Different social and cultural practices therefore all participate in discursive processes of meaningful configuration and representation.<sup>147</sup> Discourse theory does not, therefore, drive a wedge between context and text — historical and material aspects are yoked with aspects of textuality and signification through a discursive approach: “literature and society are reconnected through discourse.”<sup>148</sup> Discourse re-materialises meaning as cultural process and practice of signification that emerges through interactions and interrelations between different historical, social, political and cultural forces — in discourse theory Laclau and Mouffe dissolve the relations between discourses and non-discursive practices as there is no ontological distinction between the discourse and non-discursive or between “ideas” and their “materiality.”<sup>149</sup> An approach to cultural phenomena as discourse, from a constructionist discourse theoretical perspective, repositions language as the process through which meaning is elaborated and thereby re-ontologises language.<sup>150</sup> The abstraction and formalisation of the process of meaningful elaboration is re-materialised and re-onthologised — formalised dynamics

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<sup>146</sup> Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg, and Meaghan Morris, *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Malden, Mass. and Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. 346.

<sup>147</sup> Jørgensen and Phillips, p. 183.

<sup>148</sup> *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Vincent B. Leitch, 2nd edn (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2010), p. 5.

<sup>149</sup> Howarth, p. 116.

<sup>150</sup> Anthony Reynolds, ‘The Linguistic Return: Deconstruction as Textual Messianism’, *Substance*, 43.1 (2014), 152–65 (p. 158).

of signification are, as cultural practice, constitutive of cultural reality, they are the foundation to lived realities. Processes and dynamics of signification appear in this approach less as functional formalisations of abstract dynamics, but more as accumulated and dynamic social and cultural realities and uses, as collective forms of negotiating and formulating shared social reality.<sup>151</sup> The cumulative patterns of discursive configurations that are articulated through tensions between cumulation and interrelation, potentiality and arrangement (as discussed in the previous section) are to be understood as constitutive of cultural reality. The strong constructionist approach developed in discourse theory is useful in relation to this project for addressing the ambiguity of decadence as interrelating and spanning different cultural domains and different levels and spheres of analysis. It enables to articulate a flexible and holistic approach to decadence as particularised and localised practices tied to the literary and artistic domain in particular with broader social and cultural developments of the fin de siècle. The strong constructionist approach of discourse theory, the textualisation of cultural phenomena in this thesis, should therefore be primarily understood as an analytical strategy rather than an empirical claim on reality.<sup>152</sup>

As a systemic approach, discourse theory therefore enables a formalisation and abstraction of the dynamics of complex phenomena — a discursive approach to decadence can address the particular ambiguity and liminality of decadence by taking, at least initially, a formalist and functional approach to decadence. Rather than substantively defining what decadence means, decadence is approached through the processes that make it meaningful and significant. But as a theoretical approach focussing on language and meaning and subscribing to a strong constructionist stance,

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<sup>151</sup> Wetherell, 'Part Four: Culture and Social Relations. Editor's Introduction.', p. 284.

<sup>152</sup> Howarth, p. 13.

discourse theory enables a recontextualisation and resubstantiation of formalist conceptualisations of processes of (re)signification. A discursive approach to decadence at the fin de siècle enables a theoretical reframing of this time of crisis as a time of intense (re)signification and reformulation. As a constructionist approach, processes of meaningful elaboration are understood as the foundational cultural practice through which social and cultural reality is negotiated and articulated. Different aspects of cultural and social issues of the fin de siècle can be holistically analysed and explored through the analytical lens of processes of (re)signification. A discursive approach therefore addresses the analytical issues in relation to decadent ambiguity and liminality of how to analytically reconcile decadence across different levels and domains of analysis. How decadence spans and interrelates different levels and domains of analysis. This can be rearticulated in a constructionist and discursive approach to decadence as process of (re)signification. Different domains and types of analysis have their own logic and specificity, but they can be analytically related and articulated as participating in and performing practices and processes of meaningful elaboration. Rather than reducing complex phenomena in analyses to fragmented and isolated parts, domains or spheres and reconstituting them as straightforward sums of these parts, discourse theoretical approaches facilitate holistic and dynamic perspectives by formalising the relations and interactions between shifting aspects of cultural phenomena in discourse. Decadence is understood as profoundly imbricated in the reformulations and shifts of the fin de siècle as time of crisis. The particular semantic meaningfulness and significance of decadence at the fin de siècle is how it participates in and facilitates processes of meaningful elaboration and exploration. Decadence plays a significant role in the processes of renegotiation and reformulation taking place at the fin de siècle. It can be understood as playing out processes of

re-entry (playing out process of self-differentiation and self-reference in the reformulation of understandings); it can also be understood as opening resources and strategies for the exploration of different meaningful possibilities (opening up the field of discursivity) and facilitating the exploration of different meaningful configurations in articulation. In discourse theory therefore, (re)signification not only plays out through dynamics of repetition and variation, self-differentiation and self-reference, possibility and constraint, but the process of meaningful elaboration is re-ontologised by considering it as cultural practice that constitutes social and cultural reality, that articulates meaningful discursive configurations through cumulation and interrelation. Meaning is not a product of an addition of utterances, but cumulatively emerges in patterns of cumulation and arrangement. Reframing decadence in terms of discourse theory therefore provides theoretical resources for analysing decadence as playing out process of (re)signification (particularly in more fine-grain analyses in Chapter III, and in Chapter IV for elaborating and moving between the different levels of discursive (re)signification). In a discourse theoretical approach, meaningful entities (such as the self) are constructed through processes of meaningful elaboration. The self and sense of self, for example, are not pre-given or stabilised, but are constructed and performed in social life and interaction: “we talk ourselves into being.”<sup>153</sup> This becomes particularly relevant in analyses in III-2-B of the tensions between interiorities and exteriorities in decadent texts. Selves and inner psychological states are substantiated and elaborated through the self-conscious cumulation and arrangement of intertextual and cultural resources. New analytical perspectives can therefore be opened up by reframing the ambiguity and liminality of decadence at the fin de siècle as resources and strategies

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<sup>153</sup> Wetherell, ‘Part Three: Minds, Selves and Sense Making. Editor’s Introduction.’, p. 192.

for stimulating processes of (re)signification — processes of self-reference and self-reference differentiation, cumulation and interrelation. Computational approaches to language appear as powerful methodologies for visualising and exploring these patterns of self-reference and self-differentiation, cumulation and interrelation as will be discussed in the following section.

## **II - 3 - Computational Deformances: Computational Approaches to Textual Analysis**

There are significant overlaps between the premises of computational approaches to textual analysis and those of systems and discourse theories of meaning and signification. Computational approaches can be understood to powerfully perform and implement the theoretical premises of systems and discourse theories. Both systems theories and discourse theories practice a certain formalisation and abstraction in order to stimulate epistemological shifts in the approach to their subject/object of analysis. Both empty out the substantive nature of their subject/object of analysis in order to conceptualise and explore the processes that constitute the subject/object of analysis. With this focus on understanding how meaningful and constitutive processes unfold, both theories develop a conceptualisation of dynamics of change that is predicated on the idea of recursion — of a tension between repetition and variation. Meaningful phenomena emerge from tensions between continuity and change, self-reference and self-differentiation, possibility and constraint, cumulation and interrelation in a process that is both stabilised and coherent but also perennially mutating and shifting.

In this part of the chapter (II-3), I will be discussing how computational approaches also perform an abstraction and formalisation of the material of analysis when these resources are translated into computationally-readable text. Computational textual analysis requires a translation from analogue to digital texts which can be understood as a formalisation, a de-ontologising, of the texts which however enables epistemological shifts of perspectives and analytical possibilities that would not otherwise be possible. Furthermore, the logic of computation relies on the tensions between constraint and liberation — the rigidity of computational logics allows for the performance of radically deformative and exploratory interpretative practices. The formalisation into computational format can therefore allow for epistemological and analytical shifts. Computational approaches also enable systemic, iterative and recursive practices of analysis. The flexibility of digital formats facilitates a movement between different levels of analysis. Furthermore, using computational methods in analysis unfolds through processes of repetition and comparison (the researcher runs a query, gets a response, asks a similar but maybe slightly modified query or runs the same query but on different corpora and compares the results etc.). This therefore allows for a movement and oscillation between different scales and aspects of analysis that also contributes to stimulating analytical and epistemological shifts. Finally, computational approaches to textual analysis are also premised on the tensions between cumulation and interrelations, and can perform the exploration of patterns of cumulation and interrelation across broad corpora. Specific techniques such as topic modelling and word frequency facilitate the re-presenting of statistical patterns of cumulation, and topic modelling in particular (and collocational methods more broadly) combines this with statistical patterns of interrelations. In this way, computational methods can enable a deconstruction between formalisation and substantiation as

discussed in relation to constructionist discursive analyses above. By re-presenting the texts in terms of substantive patterns of cumulation and interrelation that constitute these texts, computational approaches facilitate the exploration of processes of (re)signification across corpora by bringing to light recurrent patterns of discursive tensions and configurations.

A combination of systemic, discursive and computational approaches can help harness the fundamental ambiguity and liminality of decadence at the fin de siècle. An initial formalist emptying out of decadence can address the tension between its fundamental diffuseness and its particular relevance and significance at the fin de siècle. This focusses less on what decadence means, and more on how it is meaningful, on the role it plays in nineteenth century cultural discussions. An initial formalisation brings to light how decadence is fundamentally liminal, structured around fundamental tensions, and interrelates and spans a number of different cultural spheres and domains, as well as levels of analysis (this will become apparent in the subsequent Chapters III and IV). As a troubling concept in troubling times, decadence can therefore be understood to simulate and play out processes of destabilisation, exploration and reformulations, i.e. processes of (re)signification. Mainstays of previous research on and conceptualisations of decadence can therefore become productively reframed and explored in terms of theories of (re)signification explored through computational approaches in order to open new analytical approaches to and perspectives on decadence at the fin de siècle.



## II - 3 - A - Logics of Computation: Issues and Potentialities of Working with Computational Methodologies for Textual Analysis

Computational approaches to textual analysis are not a unified field, but rather represent a wide range of practices.<sup>154</sup> The point of convergence, however, between scholars working with computational methodologies, is how working with these methods allows for an exploration of aspects that would otherwise remain unrepresented and unexplorable.<sup>155</sup> Using computational methods for textual analysis facilitates a particular mode of defamiliarisation, exploration and speculation in the interpretative process which stimulates epistemological reframings and shifts. There are therefore fundamental epistemological differences when working with computational methodologies for textual analysis compared to other reading methodologies such as close reading. It is necessary to critically engage with and address these epistemological variations. I will discuss here some of the debates around the epistemological ramifications, pitfalls and possibilities of working with computational approaches for textual analysis. This provides a space for the discussion of the potentials and limitations of using computational methods as a mode of textual analysis.

The criticisms and resistances to computational approaches to textual (and particularly literary) analysis can be understood to revolve around issues of reductivism, authority and absolutism of computational tools, and how these tools are

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<sup>154</sup> cf. e.g. Patrik Svensson, 'The Landscape of the Digital Humanities', *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, 4.1 (2010), 1–179 (p. 20); Patrik Svensson, 'Humanities Computing as Digital Humanities', *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, 3.3 (2009), 1–62 (p. 44).

<sup>155</sup> Katherine Bode, *Reading by Numbers. Recalibrating the Literary Field* (London and New York: Anthem Press, 2012), p. 13.

embroiled in issues of politics and power.<sup>156</sup> Computational methods for literary analysis are conceptualised as reductivist because of the processes of abstraction, decontextualisation and statistical cumulation that are fundamental to computational approaches. These are concerns that revolve around “what might be lost as a result of a turn toward computational and quantitative analysis, as the practice of thick description is abandoned in favor of the power of abstraction.”<sup>157</sup> Computers need to be instructed to carry out processes in a formal ways.<sup>158</sup> Working with computational tools involves processes of disambiguation which demand clear commands and categories. This relates to a general sense that, as Svensson puts it, working with digital methods “seem[s] more ‘digital’ than ‘humanities’.”<sup>159</sup> Quantification and counting would presume that meaning is fixed and abstracted away from the sources. The visualisations and statistical results and charts that are used in computational approaches seem to affirm a certain transparency, objectivity and certainty which is irreconcilable with the foregrounding of instability of humanistic inquiry.<sup>160</sup> Furthermore, the process of computational abstraction (both in the formatting of the sources and the results of computational methodologies) empties out the specificity and complexity of texts that

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<sup>156</sup> The distilling of criticisms levelled at working with computational methods for textual analysis draws inspiration from Bode’s classification into these categories, especially in Chapter I “Literary Studies in the Digital Age” (pp. 7-26).

<sup>157</sup> Matt Erlin and Lynne Tatlock, ‘Introduction: “Distant Reading” and the Historiography of Nineteenth-Century German Literature’, in *Distant Readings: Topologies of German Culture in the Long Nineteenth-Century*, ed. by Matt Erlin and Lynne Tatlock (Rochester, N.Y. and Woodbridge, Suffolk: Camden House, 2014), pp. 1–27 (p. 10).

<sup>158</sup> *The Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity*, ed. by Robert Frodeman (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 246.

<sup>159</sup> Patrik Svensson, ‘Envisioning The Digital Humanities’, *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, 6.1 (2012), 1–164 (p. 125).

<sup>160</sup> Todd Kontje, ‘The Case of Close Reading after the Descriptive Turn’, in *Distant Readings: Topologies of German Culture in the Long Nineteenth-Century*, ed. by Matt Erlin and Lynne Tatlock (Rochester, N.Y. and Woodbridge, Suffolk: Camden House, 2014), pp. 133–53 (p. 147).

are foundational to historically situated literary analysis.<sup>161</sup> Computational approaches smooth the complexity of language, the richness and singularity of (literary) texts.<sup>162</sup> These processes of abstraction foundational to computational methods therefore appear as incompatible with recent developments in literary theory and textuality that posit meaning as undecidable and thereby require close and critical engagement with sources under investigation. The formalism of computational methodologies chafes with the critical and sceptical stances promoted in literary analyses since the 1960s which discredited disinterested and objective analyses of literature in favour of analyses that would uncover and critique values and practices and how these are embedded in and shaped by cultural contexts.<sup>163</sup> Computational methods can therefore be understood as returning to claims of objective and disinterested analyses of previous formalist approaches, and as overlooking the assumptions built into these tools thereby eliding their imbrication in relations of power.<sup>164</sup> Consequently, computational approaches seem to subscribe to and perpetuate epistemological assumptions that are incompatible with the values that underpin humanistic research practices — by relying on numbers and numerical measures, on counting and statistics these methods can appear to subscribe to and perpetuate ideological positions and rhetorics that foreground numbers and statistics as particularly objective, absolute, efficient and total tools of knowledge.<sup>165</sup> Neoliberal and rationalist ideologies promote a discourse of objectivity and truth around number and statistics which can support

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<sup>161</sup> Kontje, p. 139.

<sup>162</sup> Bode, p. 7.

<sup>163</sup> Leitch, pp. xxxiii–xxxiv.

<sup>164</sup> cf. e.g. Leitch, p. 17; Barbara Herrnstein Smith, 'What Was "Close Reading"?: A Century of Method in Literary Studies', *Minnesota Review*, 87, 2016, 57–75 (pp. 61–62); Catherine Gallagher, 'The History of Literary Criticism', *Daedalus*, American Academic Culture in Transformation: Fifty Years, Four Disciplines, 126.1 (1997), 133–53 (pp. 134–38).

<sup>165</sup> Bode, p. 11.

relations of inequality, power and control,<sup>166</sup> and denigrate the value of qualified, situated and undecidable humanistic modes of inquiry. The computer is conceived as providing a “sense of seamless control over data, independence from the burdens of ideology and perspectival perception, and total transparency due to the unambiguous templates of formal logic and algorithmic iterability.”<sup>167</sup> There are therefore concerns about how computational practices may subscribe to and “resonate in problematic and complicit ways, with contemporary institutional discourses, especially neoliberal or economic rationalist managerial practices.”<sup>168</sup>

This relates to issues of absolutism in which computational methods are understood to make “false claims to authoritative and objective knowledge.”<sup>169</sup> There are fundamental issues of transparency and concealment in relation to computation — on the one hand, the discursive construction (as well as material design) of computation is made to perform and appear as radical transparency, yet on the other hand, this radical transparency can itself be understood as strategy for elision and concealment. Computation has recurrently been configured in terms of transparency — there is a widespread “assumption that any computational process at heart not only is predictable and repeatable but could be made entirely transparent and subjected to our control and manipulation.”<sup>170</sup> The understanding of computation that it unproblematically computes, straightforwardly counts, what is simply already there by following objective and formalised numerical operations (algorithms) elides the

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<sup>166</sup> Bode, pp. 11–12.

<sup>167</sup> Lutz Koepnick, ‘Can Computers Read?’, in *Distant Readings: Topologies of German Culture in the Long Nineteenth-Century*, ed. by Matt Erlin and Lynne Tatlock (Rochester, N.Y. and Woodbridge, Suffolk: Camden House, 2014), pp. 333–46 (p. 339).

<sup>168</sup> Bode, p. 7.

<sup>169</sup> Bode, p. 7.

<sup>170</sup> Koepnick, p. 337.

subjective and interpretative processes that take place in the unfolding of computational methods and process. The very materiality and design of computers contributes to this conceptualisation of clean, transparent and efficient computational logic. Computational tools are designed

to minimize the amount of mental effort required to visualize and manipulate these objects — the software becomes invisible so that the objects that software is manipulating are more visible (...) the computer was supposed to disappear — the system user did not need to think about the computer much at all, and could focus on manipulating the materials it was storing and presenting.<sup>171</sup>

The operations that computers perform are hidden away in the design of the computer behind interfaces and screens that are made to appear maximally seamless and transparent. The easy-to-use graphical user interfaces developed in the 1980s are a design choice made to increase usability by appearing seamlessly transparent in their concealment of computational processes.<sup>172</sup> Screens are not simply transparent but can simultaneously reveal and conceal. Computational methodologies for textual analysis, like other reading methodologies, are processes of making visible and invisible at one and the same time — depending on our queries, manipulations and intentions certain aspects will be foregrounded whilst others will be backgrounded, and computation allows to radically augment these capacities for making visible and invisible. The design of computers therefore discursively contributes to the configuration of computation as transparent, objective and straightforward delivery of

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<sup>171</sup> J. Bradley, 'Finding a Middle Ground between "Determinism" and "Aesthetic Indeterminacy": A Model for Text Analysis Tools', *Literary and Linguistic Computing*, 18.1 (2003), 185–207 (p. 189).

<sup>172</sup> Ramón Reichert and Annika Richterich, 'Introduction: Digital Materialism', *Digital Culture & Society, Digital Material/ism*, 1.1 (2015), 5–17 (p. 5).

results rather than foregrounding computational processes as a form of mediation.<sup>173</sup>

This is further supported by the rhetorical and discursive configuration of statistical methods in general: “Quantitative analysis and the visual modes it enables are presented not as representations and arguments but as essentially transparent windows into the literary text or the field more broadly.”<sup>174</sup> Similarly, as discussed in the Introduction (especially in section 3 in relation to the elaboration of the corpora) the notion of data as pure and raw information elides how data are always the result of interpretative decisions and choices. Data are configured as a given, an unproblematic and transparent reflection when data are in fact nearly always “capta:” a selection of relevant material and sources for the analysis of a particular phenomenon.<sup>175</sup> Data are not a direct reflection of the literary, social and cultural phenomena under investigation. Rather, they are a certain representation or mediation of the phenomena. Quantity and representativity should not be equated to meaning fully comprehensive. Data are unreliable, and the constructed, limited and mediated nature of cultural data needs to be explicitly acknowledged and addressed. Computational methods cannot provide total and absolute explanations, but only a new kind of perspective. Data and the statistical processes that underpin computational methods are not transparent and objective, but are partial constructions premised on particular interpretative choices and decisions based on processes of exclusion and inclusion. Computational methods are therefore to be understood as a form of mediation, a practice for representation that is partial and limited, not transparent and objective.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Svensson, ‘The Landscape of the Digital Humanities’, pp. 109, 116–17.

<sup>174</sup> Bode, pp. 16–17.

<sup>175</sup> Johanna Drucker, ‘Humanities Approaches to Graphical Display’, *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, 5.1 (2011), 1–52 (pp. 1–14, esp. 3).

<sup>176</sup> Bode, pp. 19, 22.

There are therefore potentials for misunderstanding and distortion if these issues of ostensible objectivity, of transparency and concealment, are not critically addressed and understood.<sup>177</sup> As Bode warns, if there is not an effort to develop a more nuanced understanding of the implications of computational methods “there is a significant risk that humanities scholars will not perceive computation for what it is: a new set of representational and epistemological practices and processes, whose adoption has profound consequences for humanities scholarship, and requires careful consideration.”<sup>178</sup> It is therefore necessary to critically engage with the consequences, limitations and possibilities of computational tools as epistemological and interpretative practice.<sup>179</sup> Computational approaches need to be understood as a means to an end, rather than ends in themselves, as performing and enabling particular interpretative modes of engagement and analytical possibilities. Working with computational tools in humanistic research can therefore be an opportunity for reflection on and reformulation of the understanding of both the humanities and computation since “the encounter between computing and the humanities might lead to new ways of thinking about both realms.”<sup>180</sup>

The formalisation and disambiguation required when working with computational methods can be an opportunity to exteriorise and examine the interpretative decisions involved in the analytical process. Working with computational methods requires a process of operationalising — “the process whereby concepts are transformed into a series of operations.”<sup>181</sup> This exteriorises certain aspects of the

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<sup>177</sup> Bode, p. 172.

<sup>178</sup> Bode, p. 22.

<sup>179</sup> Bode, p. 172.

<sup>180</sup> Erlin and Tatlock, p. 23.

<sup>181</sup> Franco Moretti, “‘Operationalizing’: Or, the Function of Measurement in Modern Literary Theory”, *Stanford Literary Lab Pamphlet 6*, 2013, 1–13 (p. 1).

interpretative process that would otherwise remain unexamined. Using digital methods requires the researcher to make queries in explicit ways so that they are executable in computational method. Computational tools also log the interpretative process and interpretative decisions through the recorded history of queries and operations. For example, using topic modelling with MALLET requires writing out commands in the command line (the interface used before user-friendly interfaces where commands to be executed are written out in computational language). This means that every time a topic model is run, all the different options of the query (which sources and what parameters are being chosen) need to be written out and considered explicitly. Similarly, working with NVivo is not a particularly intuitive process, there are particular steps that need to be followed to run word frequency queries that require every aspect of the query to be specified. Opting to work with computational tools that are not wholly seamless and intuitive can also contribute to reminding researchers of the hidden computational processes that are executed through the commands of our queries. Computational methods in humanistic research can therefore be used not only “to extend humanities research, but to reflect on the methods and premises that shape our approach to knowledge and our understanding of how interpretation is framed.”<sup>182</sup> It is necessary not to fall prey to the “fallacy of mastery” that lurks in the seeming objectivity and transparency of computational tools and the totalising rhetorics that revolve around “big data” which consolidates the belief that “given a powerful enough search engine, . . . we can have access to knowledge about anything on earth — and anything from the past.”<sup>183</sup> However, it must also be recognised more conventional methods “have no

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<sup>182</sup> Johanna Drucker and Bethany Nowviskie, ‘Speculative Computing: Aesthetic Provocations in Humanities Computing’, in *A Companion to Digital Humanities*, ed. by Susan Schreibman, Ray Siemens, and John Unsworth (Blackwell, 2004), p. n/a <<http://www.digitalhumanities.org/companion/>>.

<sup>183</sup> Darton qtd. in Erlin and Tatlock, p. 10.



greater claim than [the] electronic media to mastery of the past.”<sup>184</sup> A process of abstraction and formalisation that relies on the foregrounding of some elements over others is arguably at work in any analytical practice.<sup>185</sup> Experimenting with and combining different modes of analysis can contribute to elucidating the limitations and strengths of each of these modes of inquiry, as well as contribute to the elaboration of multi-perspectival analyses. Working with computational methods in literary analysis “can help us move beyond the conventional frameworks we use to organize our research”<sup>186</sup> in the way in which these methods offer different analytical perspectives. In particular, shifting from single or small number of texts to cumulative scales and new modes of abstraction can provide opportunities for reframing and reevaluating particular ideas and texts in relation to “the larger structures and constellations in which individual texts participate.”<sup>187</sup>

Reservations about computational methods in literary studies specifically may also have to do with the way in which computational approaches have been presented in opposition to foundational methods of literary analysis and inquiry. Close reading is a method that is “virtually definitive of the field of literary studies.”<sup>188</sup> Close reading was the practice foregrounded by the New Critics in order to provide legitimacy to literary studies as a discipline by linking literary studies to a particular and specialised technical skill. Literary studies could therefore become defined and distinguished from other disciplines through the practice of close reading which specified, delimited and

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<sup>184</sup> Erlin and Tatlock, p. 10.

<sup>185</sup> Erlin and Tatlock, p. 10.

<sup>186</sup> Matt Erlin, ‘The Location of Literary History: Topic Modelling, Network Analysis, and the German Novel, 1731-1864’, in *Distant Readings: Topologies of German Culture in the Long Nineteenth-Century*, ed. by Matt Erlin and Lynne Tatlock (Rochester, N.Y. and Woodbridge, Suffolk: Camden House, 2014), pp. 55–90 (p. 56).

<sup>187</sup> Erlin, p. 56.

<sup>188</sup> Herrnstein Smith, p. 58.

legitimised the area of expertise of literary scholars in relation to other scholars.<sup>189</sup> As Herrnstein Smith points out, however, close reading is not the only, definitive or exhaustive way of practising analysis.<sup>190</sup> Furthermore, methodology is not the only aspect that defines a field of inquiry or a discipline, there is also the focus on key debates or key questions that emerge from “ongoing interests and problems.”<sup>191</sup> The questions we ask, the materials we look at in our investigations as well as how we develop interpretations can also feed into the delimitations of a field of inquiry and study.

The emergence of computational methods in literary studies has been developed through the opposition between close reading and computational methods as distant reading practices. Essentially, close reading involves “reading individual text closely” or “a technically informed, fine-grained analysis of some piece of writing, usually in connection with some broader question of interest.”<sup>192</sup> In carving out a space for computational methods in literary scholarship, however, Moretti has been instrumental in foregrounding distant reading as anathema to close reading (although his polemical work has contributed to opening up a space for productive discussion). In a response to criticisms of his *Graphs, Maps, Trees* (2005), Moretti asserts: “Between interpretation (that tends to make a close reading of a single text) and explanation (that works with abstract models on a large groups [sic] of texts) I see an antithesis. Not just difference, but an either/or choice.”<sup>193</sup> And throughout his work, Moretti unequivocally chooses explanation, as when he argues that “quantitative data are useful because

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<sup>189</sup> Herrnstein Smith, p. 62.

<sup>190</sup> Herrnstein Smith, p. 67.

<sup>191</sup> Herrnstein Smith, p. 67.

<sup>192</sup> Herrnstein Smith, p. 58.

<sup>193</sup> Franco Moretti, ‘Moretti Responds (II)’, in *Reading ‘Graphs, Maps, Trees’: Responses to Franco Moretti*, ed. by Jonathan Goodwin and John Holbo (Anderson: Parlor Press, 2011), pp. 73–75 (p. 74).

they are independent of interpretation.”<sup>194</sup> Moretti is therefore being self-consciously polemical when he situates his work with computational approaches in opposition to close reading practices, pitching the two modes of interpretation against one another as irreconcilable. In “Conjectures on World Literature” (2000), in which Moretti coins the term “distant reading,” he was specifically targeting comparative literature for failing to develop an approach to literature as a “planetary system.”<sup>195</sup> Moretti is aiming to provoke in order to generate discussions and reconsiderations of the strengths, limitations and assumptions of literary modes of inquiry. However, he is also thereby problematically downplaying the subjective and interpretative aspects of analyses involving computational methods, and in doing so he seems to assert a form of knowledge that is absolute, transcendent, total and true.<sup>196</sup> In this way, Moretti’s configuration of distant reading is in fact reinforcing precisely what he set out to debunk: uncritical and fallacious claims to generalisation and representativeness.<sup>197</sup>

The fundamental difference that Moretti wants to highlight by opposing close and distant reading is that close reading is a practice in which the number of texts that can be engaged with is necessarily small, and distant reading is built on the premise that a different modes of engagement with a broader number of texts opens up valuable analytical perspectives: “Distant reading: where distance, let me repeat it, *is a condition of knowledge*: it allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes—or genres and systems.”<sup>198</sup> As this quote

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<sup>194</sup> Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (London: Verso, 2005), p. 30.

<sup>195</sup> Erlin and Tatlock, pp. 2–3.

<sup>196</sup> Bode, p. 11.

<sup>197</sup> Bode, p. 16.

<sup>198</sup> Franco Moretti, ‘Conjectures on World Literature’, *New Left Review*, 1 (2000), 54–68 (p. 57) emphasis in original.

from Moretti already suggests, however, distant reading is not just about abstraction and scope, it is also an iterative shifting movement between different perspectives and scales (between “units that are much smaller or much larger than the text”<sup>199</sup>).

Furthermore, whilst in close reading practices the focus is often on a small number of texts, this approach also often draws on broader discussions, debates and contexts thereby also moving between different scales of analysis. The aims of close reading are therefore not necessarily very far from the aims of distant readings — both are analytical and interpretative reading processes that engage with different aspects of texts at different scales.<sup>200</sup> The term “scalable reading” (coined by Martin Mueller) has sometimes been used “to emphasize that there is no such thing as an opposition between close and distant reading. In his view, these positions differ instead in relation to the amount of text they process.”<sup>201</sup> The cumulative patterns of abstraction generated through computational methods are therefore often used to stimulate higher-level analytical perspectives in which particular examples are reframed and repositioned. Computational methods can “perform rough mapping operations that are then followed by a targeted examination of selected examples.”<sup>202</sup> This offers alternative practices to relating general patterns with particular instances. Computational methods therefore do not do away completely with thick and close analyses, but rather offer different epistemological modes and possibilities through which these analyses can be developed.

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<sup>199</sup> Moretti, ‘Conjectures on World Literature’, p. 57.

<sup>200</sup> Erlin and Tatlock, p. 9; cf. also Herrnstein’s discussion of Moretti’s in-depth analysis of trends in the uses of indefinite and definite articles in novel titles in Herrnstein Smith, pp. 71–72.

<sup>201</sup> Fotis Jannidis and Gerhard Lauer, ‘Burrows’s Delta and Its Use in German Literary History’, in *Distant Readings: Topologies of German Culture in the Long Nineteenth-Century*, ed. by Matt Erlin and Lynne Tatlock (Rochester, N.Y. and Woodbridge, Suffolk: Camden House, 2014), pp. 29–54 (p. 31).

<sup>202</sup> Jannidis and Lauer, p. 31.

Whilst computational approaches to literary analysis can therefore be seen as overlapping with or an extension of interpretative reading practices already in use, there are also, however, crucial differences between close reading practices and computational reading practices. These differences and augmentations are what constitute the particular potentialities and limitations of each approach, and, as will become apparent throughout these discussions, the aspects that are potentially problematic are also often the aspects that are also most innovative and productive. As noted earlier, by applying computational technologies to (large) cultural datasets, researchers can develop interpretative insights that could not otherwise be possible to achieve without relying on these technologies.<sup>203</sup> As Svensson argues, the particularity of working with computational methods for analysis “partly comes from the epistemic investment in technology as tool.”<sup>204</sup> Recognising the analytical and epistemological possibilities and limitations of computational approaches to textual analysis means “transforming the computer from machine to tool, from a device that automates mundane mental tasks to one that augments critical and creative thought.”<sup>205</sup> Computation provides a host of flexible and adaptive tools and methodologies that can be used to develop and augment interpretative and epistemological practices.<sup>206</sup> The premise of working with computational methods is that these methods stimulate epistemological shifts and possibilities not possible otherwise — these methods can augment epistemological capacities. Augmentation is the extension of “intellectual and

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<sup>203</sup> cf. e.g. Svensson, ‘The Landscape of the Digital Humanities’, pp. 103-172 esp.; Chris Forster, ‘I’m Chris. Where Am I Wrong?’, *Hastac*, 2010 <<https://www.hastac.org/blogs/cforster/2010/09/08/im-chris-where-am-i-wrong>> [accessed 25 November 2016].

<sup>204</sup> Svensson, ‘The Landscape of the Digital Humanities’, p. 24.

<sup>205</sup> Andrea Laue, ‘How the Computer Works’, in *A Companion to Digital Humanities*, ed. by Susan Schreibman, Ray Siemens, and John Unsworth (Malden, Mass. and Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 145–60 (p. 159).

<sup>206</sup> McCarty, pp. 10–15.

cognitive – even imaginative – capabilities through prosthetic means.”<sup>207</sup> The methods, tools and technologies we use have an impact on our cognitive and imaginary possibilities.<sup>208</sup> Computational methods as tools therefore “affec[t] analysis itself rather than its scope, speed or convenience.”<sup>209</sup> Computers are not neutral artefacts, nor are they only tools of replication, confirmation or validation. Rather, working with computational methods can enable defamiliarising and exploratory practices that have an effect on our cognitive and interpretative capabilities.<sup>210</sup> Digital culture has effects on the nature and scope of the material we use in our analyses.<sup>211</sup> This entails and is combined with a transformation in heuristic possibilities, in the practice of analysis itself which “presents us with patterns and connections in the human record that we would never otherwise have found or examined.”<sup>212</sup> The particular possibilities and contributions of working with computational methods foregrounded in this project therefore do not have to do with providing final solutions, empirically verifying and closing off debates, but rather with the possibilities of epistemological and analytical defamiliarisation, exploration and speculation that can open up new questions and analytical perspectives.<sup>213</sup> Computational approaches in this sense are “an exploratory and experimental practice, aimed not at producing final and definitive answers but at enabling a process of investigation and speculation.”<sup>214</sup> I will explore further in the following section the ways in which computational approaches can be understood to

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<sup>207</sup> Drucker and Nowviskie.

<sup>208</sup> Svensson, ‘Envisioning The Digital Humanities’, p. 34.

<sup>209</sup> McCarty, p. 207.

<sup>210</sup> Svensson, ‘Envisioning The Digital Humanities’, p. 34.

<sup>211</sup> Jannidis and Lauer, p. 30.

<sup>212</sup> Susan Schreibman, Ray Siemens, and John Unsworth, ‘The Digital Humanities and Humanities Computing: An Introduction’, in *A Companion to Digital Humanities*, ed. by Susan Schreibman, Ray Siemens, and John Unsworth (Malden, Mass. and Oxford: Blackwell, 2010), pp. xxiii–xxvii (p. xxvi).

<sup>213</sup> Erlin, p. 78.

<sup>214</sup> Bode, p. 23.

augment the theoretical and analytical approaches developed in this project in particular.

## **II - 3 - B - Poetics of Computation: Computational Practices of Deformance**

As discussed in the Introduction, the translation from analogue to digital format already involves a number of interpretative decisions. The text digitally reformatted for computational reading is also semiotically impoverished in the suppression of details of layout and topography. Furthermore, computational reconfigurations of texts through queries and searches also involve processes of abstraction — the re-presenting of the material along statistical trends suppresses certain details and particularities and foregrounds others. This reduction of the material along different statistical patterns can however stimulate epistemological shifts in perspectives.<sup>215</sup> The reduction and simplification, the suppression of particularities, in computational reconfigurations and digital reformatting are necessary preconditions for enabling other modes of engagement with the material — the aim is not, at least initially, to engage with the particularities and the details, but to develop a new analytical frame and perspective, to explore cumulative generalisations.<sup>216</sup> As discussed previously, formalisation and abstraction involve the reduction or simplified retranscription of phenomena which enables epistemological shifts in perspective. Even though “[a]bstraction means throwing away detail, getting rid of particulars [...] By doing it we produce the concepts

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<sup>215</sup> cf. e.g. Gerlinde Mautner, ‘Corpora and Critical Discourse Analysis’, in *Contemporary Corpus Linguistics*, ed. by Paul Baker (London and New York: Continuum, 2012), pp. 32–46 (p. 34).

<sup>216</sup> Bode, p. 14.

we use to make explanatory generalizations, or that we analogize with across cases.”<sup>217</sup> The processes of digital abstraction therefore harness the tensions between visibility and concealment to stimulate new perspectives. The visual reconfiguration of texts generates new perspectives. The patterns that emerge from these processes of abstraction and formalisation would not otherwise be apprehensible.<sup>218</sup> The abstraction and reduction involved in digital reformatting and computational reconfigurations are therefore precisely what makes these approaches valuable for generating analytical explorations and insights.

The translation to digital format might involve losses in certain aspects of the material (semiotically impoverishing the text), but these are necessary for gains in other areas. The translation into digital format involves a process of simplification and reduction, but this also opens up possibilities of radical malleability and plasticity.<sup>219</sup> Computers process material by cutting it up into discrete digital units. Certain aspects of the original material are discarded in the translation into digital format and representation. The translation to digital format therefore “requires that everything is transformed from the continuous flow of our everyday reality into a grid of numbers that can be stored as a representation of reality which can then be manipulated using algorithms.”<sup>220</sup> Berry understands the impact of digital reformatting of texts on two levels: on the level of *episteme*, there is a new mode of abstraction of the material, a new representation of the material; on the level of *techne*, applying computational tools to these digital representations allows for new ways of manipulating this material which

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<sup>217</sup> Kieran Healy, ‘Fuck Nuance’, *Sociological Theory*, 35.2 (2017), 118–27 (p. 121).

<sup>218</sup> Bode, p. 23.

<sup>219</sup> David Berry, ‘The Computational Turn: Thinking about Digital Humanities’, *Culture Machine*, 12 (2011), 1–23 (p. 1).

<sup>220</sup> Berry, p. 2.



gives rise to new analytical, new ways of interrogating the material.<sup>221</sup> Consequently, “[b]y changing the form that the archives take, technology also transforms the ways in which they can be searched and the types of questions that can be asked of them.”<sup>222</sup> Digital formats allow for computational practices of textual manipulations such as search and retrieval and statistical decompositions that radically reconfigure the texts. Computational methods therefore do not simply quantitatively perform what was previously done qualitative. Rather, new forms of qualitative analysis can be developed on the basis of quantitative methods.<sup>223</sup>

Analysis unfolds through processes of taking apart and putting back together into new configurations for the purposes of discovery, defamiliarisation and reflection.<sup>224</sup> New analytical insights can be unfolded through the fragmentation and decomposition of material into constitutive parts — the text is fragmented into units which enable a formalisation of the text that generates new perspectives. The malleability and plasticity of digital texts allow for an augmentation of these strategies of fragmentation and reconfiguration. The capacities of fragmentation of computational processes can pinpoint every instance of particular features across corpora of texts “and then present those features in a visual format entirely foreign to the original organization in which these features appear.”<sup>225</sup> The malleability of digital formats allows for material to be decomposed and recomposed, disassembled and

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<sup>221</sup> Berry, p. 2.

<sup>222</sup> Bode, p. 1.

<sup>223</sup> Berry, p. 11.

<sup>224</sup> Geoffrey Rockwell, ‘What Is Text Analysis, Really?’, *Literary and Linguistic Computing*, 18.2 (2003), 209–19 (p. 215).

<sup>225</sup> Stephen Ramsay, *Reading Machines. Toward an Algorithmic Criticism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), pp. 16–17.

reassembled such that it becomes radically transformed.<sup>226</sup> Texts can become reduced along different analytical lines of inquiry — different aspects of the texts can be searched, retrieved and re-presented. Texts can be cut up in different ways and then returned to the integral original form with minimal effort.<sup>227</sup> The computational decomposition and re-presentation of digital texts along different analytical queries allow for radical deformation and re-visualisation which are vital to stimulating new analytical insights.<sup>228</sup> The radical reconfiguration of the text allows the researcher to see things differently or to imagine things otherwise which can unfold new interpretive possibilities.<sup>229</sup> Working with digital tools can therefore be a strategy for estrangement, but not for objectivity — the translation into digital formats, and the processes of reconfiguration are all underpinned by and made meaningful through subjective interpretative decisions and choices.

The requirements of working with digital tools, those “of complete explicitness and absolute consistency,” can open up what McCarthy calls “the *via negativa* or ‘negative way’ to knowledge,”<sup>230</sup> a certain mode of analysis and interpretation that is predicated on strategies of defamiliarisation in order to stimulate insights. The logic of computation demands disambiguation of complex issues in their translation into computational queries. These constraints of the rigid logic of computation, however, also permit powerful generative processes of reconfiguration and re-presentation. In

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<sup>226</sup> Stéfan Sinclair, ‘Computer-Assisted Reading: Reconceiving Text Analysis’, *Literary and Linguistic Computing*, 18.2 (2003), 175–82 (p. 180).

<sup>227</sup> Laurence Anthony, ‘Issues in the Design and Development of Software Tools for Corpus Studies: The Case for Collaboration’, in *Contemporary Corpus Linguistics*, ed. by Paul Baker (London and New York: Continuum, 2012), pp. 87–104 (p. 88); Stephen Ramsay, ‘Toward an Algorithmic Criticism’, *Literary and Linguistic Computing*, 18.2 (2003), 167–74 (p. 169); Svensson, ‘The Landscape of the Digital Humanities’, pp. 131, 158.

<sup>228</sup> Berry, p. 1; Bradley, p. 187; Rockwell, p. 209.

<sup>229</sup> Erlin and Tatlock, p. 8.

<sup>230</sup> McCarty, p. 5.

this way, “algorithmic criticism attempts to employ the rigid, inexorable, uncompromising logic of algorithmic transformation as the constraint under which critical vision may flourish.”<sup>231</sup> As discussed in relation to systems theories, meaningful phenomena can emerge from the tensions between liberation and constraint. Similarly, the constraints of computational logics can “allow new meanings to emerge — new ways of seeing the semantic relations at hand.”<sup>232</sup> Our processes of selecting, isolating and noticing in order to yield revealing patterns are based on intuition and experience and influenced by context. Computational methods decompose the text algorithmically, i.e. by exactly following particular queries and specifications (commands) in a highly formalised and codified fashion.<sup>233</sup> Computational methods can therefore stimulate new modes of engagement with the materials under analysis through “disciplined play.”<sup>234</sup> The rigid logics of computation allow for flexible formalisations and reformalisation that enable speculative and playful experimentation.<sup>235</sup> Computational methods provide “a highly regulated method for disordering the senses of a text” in such a way that “we can imagine things about the text that we did not and perhaps could not otherwise know.”<sup>236</sup> Computational methods can therefore be understood in this context as practices for generating speculative insights and new perspectives rather than as assessing or ascertaining truth or value.<sup>237</sup> The rigour and formalism of computation is

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<sup>231</sup> Ramsay, *Reading Machines.*, p. 32.

<sup>232</sup> Ramsay, ‘Toward an Algorithmic Criticism’, p. 170.

<sup>233</sup> Koepnick, p. 344.

<sup>234</sup> Rockwell, p. 216.

<sup>235</sup> Stéfan Sinclair, p. 181.

<sup>236</sup> Jerome McGann and Lisa Samuels, ‘Deformance and Interpretation’, *New Literary History*, Poetry & Poetics, 30.1 (1999), 25–56 (p. 36).

<sup>237</sup> Bode, pp. 23–24; Stéfan Sinclair, p. 176.

not to performed to produce verifiability, objectivity, but enhance serendipity and to open up towards new analytical possibilities.<sup>238</sup>

Computational manipulations are performed through the execution of algorithms. Algorithms are “encoded procedures for transforming input data into a desired output, based on specified calculations.”<sup>239</sup> Computational tools allow for algorithms to be performed on data. The reconfigurations of data are therefore algorithmic performative processes: “Algorithms do things, and their syntax embodies a command structure to enable this to happen.”<sup>240</sup> Computational reconfigurations concretely, visibly re-present and re-visualise the material according to particular queries or commands (algorithms). McGann and Samuels highlight this in their concept of “deformance” that they use to refer to the possibilities of reconfiguration enabled through computational processes — “a word that usefully combines a number of terms, including ‘form’, ‘deform’ and ‘performance’.”<sup>241</sup> The confluence of these terms in deformance suggests how the manipulation of formal aspects — deformations and reformations — explores and brings to light the formative, performative and generative capacities of form. Computational deformances deconstruct the distinctions between form and substance, abstraction and presence, latency and surface. Computational methods fragment and decompose texts according to disambiguated and codified commands that reconfigure the “surface” phenomena of texts (particular words or

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<sup>238</sup> Ramsay, *Reading Machines.*, p. 32; Ramsay, ‘Toward an Algorithmic Criticism’, pp. 167–70; Stephen Ramsay, ‘The Hermeneutics of Screwing Around; or What You Do with a Million Books’, in *Pastplay: Teaching and Learning History with Technology*, ed. by Kevin Kee (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), pp. 111–20 (p. 116).

<sup>239</sup> Tarleton Gillespie, ‘The Relevance of Algorithms’, in *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality and Society*, ed. by Tarleton Gillespie, Pablo J. Boczkowski, and Kirsten A. Foot (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2014), pp. 167–94 (p. 167).

<sup>240</sup> Andrew Goffey, ‘Algorithm’, in *Software Studies: A Lexicon*, ed. by Matthew Fuller (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), pp. 15–20 (p. 17).

<sup>241</sup> Ramsay, *Reading Machines.*, p. 33.

groups of words). Computational methods can only manipulate “those signs and structural elements that a text surrenders without any resistance,”<sup>242</sup> aspects of text that seem too obvious to be meaningful. Surface is understood here not “as a layer that conceals, as clothing does skin, or encloses, as a building’s facade does its interior. [Rather,] we take surface to mean what is evident, perceptible, apprehensible in texts; what is neither hidden nor hiding.”<sup>243</sup> This citation from Best and Marcus suggests how computational methods play out tensions between concealment and visibility, latency and surface. Best and Marcus may emphasise surface as transparency, as what is openly perceptible, but their surface reading is aimed at developing “aggregates of what is manifest in multiple texts as cognitively latent but semantically continuous.”<sup>244</sup> It is not simply surface phenomena themselves that are the focus of analysis, but rather how the cumulation, the aggregation, of surface phenomena suggests latent processes of meaningful elaboration that can be explored and apprehended through computational reconfiguration of these surface phenomena.

It is only through their indirect reconfiguration that surface phenomena become interpretatively suggestive. Computational methods are deployed in this project on corpora of texts that are grouped together according to particular analytical features and rationales (as discussed in the Introduction, section 3) in order to observe patterns of cumulation and interrelation, repetition and variation across these corpora of texts.

As Sinclair argues,

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<sup>242</sup> Tobias Boes, ‘The Vocations of the Novel: Distant-Reading Occupational Change in Nineteenth-Century German Literature’, in *Distant Readings: Topologies of German Culture in the Long Nineteenth-Century*, ed. by Matt Erlin and Lynne Tatlock (Rochester, N.Y. and Woodbridge, Suffolk: Camden House, 2014), pp. 259–84 (p. 261).

<sup>243</sup> Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, ‘Surface Reading: An Introduction’, *Representations*, 108.1 (2009), 1–21 (p. 9).

<sup>244</sup> Best and Marcus, p. 11.

[t]he essence of the corpus as against the text is that you do not observe it directly; instead you use tools of indirect observation, like query languages, concordancers, collocators, parsers, and aligners [...] the whole point of making something a corpus rather than a collection of texts is in order to observe things which cannot be directly observed because they are too far apart, they are too frequent or infrequent, or they are only observable after some kind of numerical or statistical process.<sup>245</sup>

The tools used in computational analysis are the means through which elements across the corpora are reconfigured and re-presented — “a corpus does not provide us with any information directly (...) it only becomes valuable when we start observing it *indirectly*.”<sup>246</sup> A consideration of the tools we use and what they can perform is essential in analyses that are developed in combination with computational methods. As Anthony argues, there is often a heavy focus on the elaboration and rationale of the corpora, but this focus on issues of corpus design can overlook the rationale for selection of tools.<sup>247</sup>

Word frequency tools fragment the corpora into lists of most recurrent words. Word frequency queries therefore can provide an indication of the most frequent words across corpora, the aggregation of signs across corpora, which can be analytically filtered into meaningful patterns of cumulation. Computational methods such as word frequency queries allow for transtextual analyses, for analyses “of patterns (recurrent phenomena) that emerge across multiple texts, patterns that systematically re-occur in multiple texts.”<sup>248</sup> These recurring surface phenomena can be interpreted into

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<sup>245</sup> John Sinclair, *Trust the Text: Language, Corpus and Discourse* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 189.

<sup>246</sup> Anthony, p. 90 emphasis in original.

<sup>247</sup> Anthony, p. 90.

<sup>248</sup> Jürgen Spitzmüller and Ingo H. Warnke, ‘Discourse as a “Linguistic Object”: Methodical and Methodological Delimitations’, *Critical Discourse Studies*, 8.2 (2011), 75–94 (p. 87).

meaningful patterns that suggest key social and cultural concerns.<sup>249</sup> Word frequency queries therefore play out tensions between specificity and generality, individuality and collectivity. Cumulative frequency patterns are “a useful compromise between an instance of specific behaviour of a lexical item and a generalization for which the specific examples are evidence.”<sup>250</sup> Word frequency queries are therefore useful tools to identify higher level amalgamations and accumulations shaped through a plurality of instances. Furthermore, in the NVivo software I use in this project, Text Search queries can be performed on individual words in the word frequency results in order to provide a root back to each individual instance of a frequent word (cf. Figure 2 below). These computational methods can therefore facilitate an oscillation between a cumulative, systemic view and localised instances. Word frequency queries fragment texts into a list of frequent words as well as provide a means to returning back to particular contextualised instances. Word frequencies queries in NVivo are therefore particularly suited to systemic approaches that are also grounded in contextualised and localised analyses since these tools facilitate the identification of recurring word across corpora whilst also offering ways of tunnelling back to each particular instance of use that shape the broader patterns.

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<sup>249</sup> Mautner, pp. 32–33.

<sup>250</sup> Hunston and Francis qtd. in David Oakey, ‘Fixed Collocational Patterns in Isolexical and Isotextual Versions of a Corpus’, in *Contemporary Corpus Linguistics*, ed. by Paul Baker (London and New York: Continuum, 2012), pp. 140–58 (p. 143).

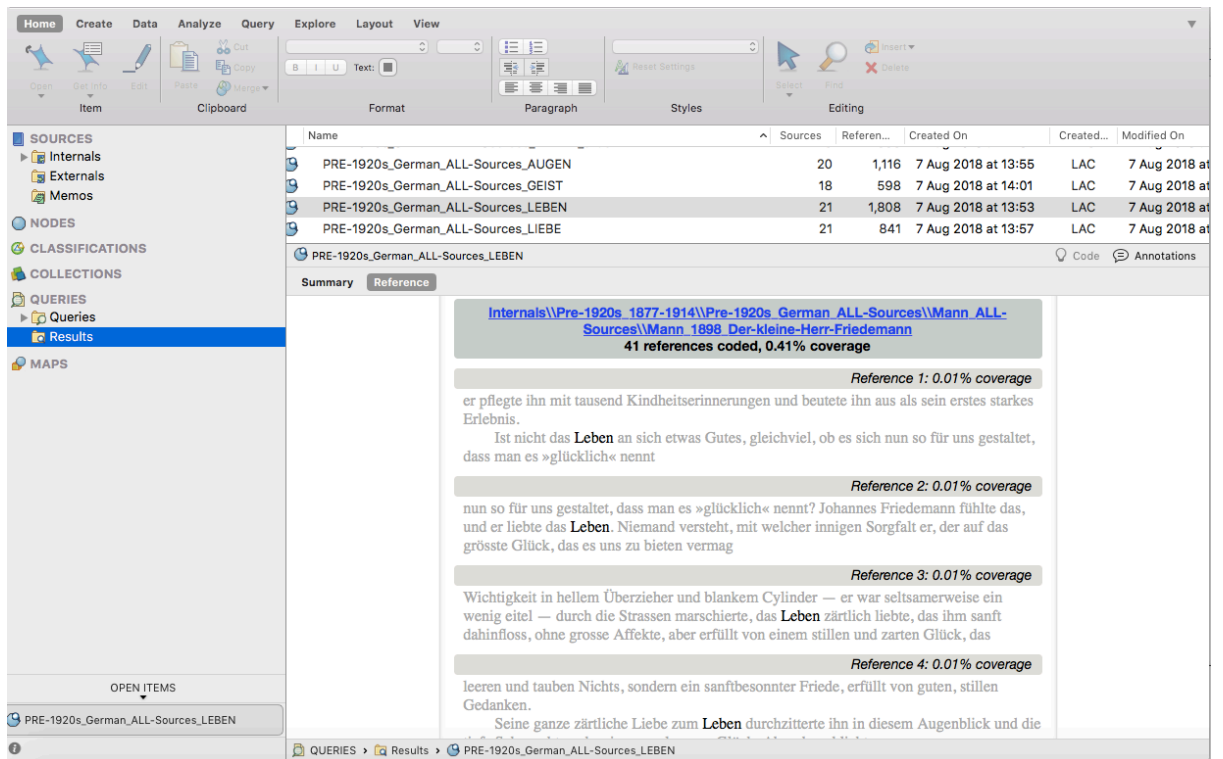


Figure 2 Recontextualisation of the keyword "Leben" in NVivo

These cumulative patterns of generalised individuality or abstracted plurality can be understood as “concrete universal[s],” the term used by Wimsatt to evoke how literature has been recurrently referred to as both rooted in particularity and universally meaningful.<sup>251</sup> The universality of literature, the repeatability of the meaningfulness of certain texts, can emerge precisely from the concrete particularity, the contingency of detail, the “irrelevant concreteness in descriptive detail.”<sup>252</sup> The universal meaningfulness of literature is linked to irrelevant concrete particularities, to surface details and phenomena. Yet the repeatable meaningfulness of the details is not linked to the nature of the details themselves, but rather “in what by their arrangement they

<sup>251</sup> W.K. Jr. Wimsatt, ‘The Structure of the “Concrete Universal” in Literature’, *PMLA*, 62.1 (1947), 262–80 (p. 262).

<sup>252</sup> Wimsatt, p. 269.



*show* implicitly.”<sup>253</sup> As mentioned above, therefore, surface phenomena, the concreteness of details, are meaningful through their latent arrangement and distribution. In other words, meaningful configurations emerge through interrelations as well as cumulation, through latent patterns of cumulation and interrelation, of regularities in dispersion. Topic modelling is a computational method that reconfigures texts according to statistical patterns of cumulation and interrelation of words and groups of words across texts. The list of topics that topic models re-present are bags of words that co-occur across the corpora.<sup>254</sup> Individual topics re-present regularities in the distribution of words across the corpora. And these topics are understood to re-present how regularities or particular discursive configurations (individual topics) that span across the corpora are elaborated through cumulation and interrelation, through the recurrent clustering of words with one another across a distribution of possible words: “if we think of texts as being compiled by assembling words from a series of semantically coherent lists, then topic modelling allows us to infer those lists.”<sup>255</sup> Topic modelling, therefore is not simply about producing word frequency counts, but rather develops a model of, speculates about, the ways in which texts elaborate meaning. The list of all topics in a topic model is a probabilistic estimation of the repository of terms and semantics that span the texts. The individual topic within the list of topics re-presents how these semantics are interrelated into particular combinations and configurations across the texts.<sup>256</sup> Topic modelling therefore speculates on the foundational semantics that are used in the elaboration of meaning across the texts in

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<sup>253</sup> Wimsatt, p. 270 emphasis in original.

<sup>254</sup> Erlin, p. 58; Erlin and Tatlock, p. 12.

<sup>255</sup> Erlin, p. 59.

<sup>256</sup> Erlin, p. 64.

the corpora.<sup>257</sup> Topic modelling re-presents the latent semantics, the repository of resources, that texts draw on to create meaning.<sup>258</sup> Computational deformances facilitated through topic modelling therefore rely on surface phenomena, on words and groups of words, to speculate about and re-present the latent processes from which meaning emerges. Topic models visualise “the latency of the lexically manifest, the meaning of the distributed recurrences of language that otherwise escapes our critical consciousness.”<sup>259</sup> The latency in topic modelling is about decomposing texts into their constitutive units and probabilistically exploring how these are put together in order to speculate about the meaningful processes that constitute the texts:

*Latent* refers to the model’s assumption that the aforementioned clusters of words exist and are responsible in a specific sense for the word frequencies observed in the corpus. As these groups of words are themselves hidden, their distribution in the corpus needs to be inferred.<sup>260</sup>

Topic models therefore re-present texts according to speculations on patterns of interrelation and cumulation that would not otherwise be visible. Topic modelling is premised on and develops a model of the latent processes of meaningful elaboration that constitute texts.

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<sup>257</sup> Jonathan Chang and others, ‘Reading Tea Leaves: How Humans Interpret Topic Models’, *Advances in Neural Information Processing Systems*, 22 (2009), 288–96 (p. 288).

<sup>258</sup> Mark Steyvers and Tom Griffiths, ‘Probabilistic Topic Models’, in *Latent Semantic Analysis: A Road to Meaning*, ed. by T. Landauer and others (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), pp. 427–48 (p. 440).

<sup>259</sup> Andrew Piper and Mark Algee-Hewitt, ‘The Werther Effect I: Goethe, Objecthood, and the Handling of Knowledge’, in *Distant Readings: Topologies of German Culture in the Long Nineteenth-Century*, ed. by Matt Erlin and Lynne Tatlock (Rochester, N.Y. and Woodbridge, Suffolk: Camden House, 2014), pp. 155–84 (p. 157).

<sup>260</sup> Riddell, p. 100 emphasis in original.

In this project, the tools of word frequency queries and topic modelling allow for the re-presentation of patterns of cumulation and interrelation, repetition and variation, across corpora. This radical re-presentation of surface phenomena concretises how form is constitutive of meaning, how the arrangement and interrelation of surface phenomena contribute to meaningful processes of elaboration. By radically reorganising the surface phenomena of texts through the visualisation of patterns of distribution, computational deformances allow to explore how “meaning is constructed through processes of circulation.”<sup>261</sup> Word frequency and topic modelling therefore stimulate explorations of meaning as a dynamics of cumulation and interrelation, since “meaning is more a dynamic exchange than a discoverable content, and that the exchange is best revealed as a play of differences.”<sup>262</sup> The patterns of cumulations and interrelations that word frequency and topic modelling re-present are a mediation of the play of differences that are constitutive of the processes of meaningful elaboration. Therefore, computational methods through deformative processes allow for the exploration of the patterns and processes of meaningful elaboration, of how meaning is constituted through the circulation and interconnection of different elements. Furthermore, the abstractions and formalisations realised through these computational deformation are based on statistical cumulative patterns, and are therefore not simply emptied out formalisations, but reconfigurations, re-presentations that re-ontologise abstract formalisation. Meaning in discourse analysis emerges through the cumulation and interrelation of statements — a discourse is a body of statements, and the discursive configurations are regularities in the dispersion of statements.<sup>263</sup> Meaning is

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<sup>261</sup> Erlin and Tatlock, p. 8.

<sup>262</sup> McGann and Samuels, p. 31.

<sup>263</sup> Niels Åkerstrøm Andersen, p. 8.

a configuration, an actualisation from all the possibilities in the field of discursivity. By re-presenting patterns of cumulation and interrelation, computational deformances generated through topic modelling in particular can suggest patterns of regularity in dispersion. These computational methods of textual analysis therefore subscribe to and perform the theoretical premises of discourse theory in which the formalist theorisation of meaning is re-ontologised as cumulative patterns of regularity in dispersion that constitute shared social and cultural reality. Through computational deformance — through processes that perform statistical procedures and calculations on texts — the material under investigation becomes radically reconfigured. This reconfiguration of surface phenomena (words and groups of words) according to statistical trends that organise, assemble and constitute the material are not simply empty abstractions, but are rather a radical re-presenting of the constitutive processes of cumulation and interrelation that constitute the material. This reconfiguration and visualisation of the play of relations, the dynamics of cumulation and interrelation, can open up towards new perspectives, new versions of understanding.<sup>264</sup>

These statistical patterns of cumulation and interrelation are not fixed, purely empirical and objective transcriptions of the material under study. Rather, these computational deformances stimulate the elaboration and identification of patterns through subjective interpretation. As Ramsay notes:

Critics often use the word “pattern” to describe what they’re putting forth, and that word aptly connotes the fundamental nature of the data upon which literary insight relies. The understanding promised by the critical act arises not from a presentation of facts but from the elaboration of a gestalt.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> Edward W. Said, ‘The Problem of Textuality: Two Exemplary Positions’, *Critical Inquiry*, 4.4 (1978), 673–714 (p. 675).

<sup>265</sup> Ramsay, *Reading Machines.*, p. 15.

These notions of pattern and deformance highlight the unstable and subjective nature of these computational reconfigurations. Word frequency do not produce patterns, and are not meaningful in and of themselves. They are simply a list of words that is developed according to parameters set by the researcher. Meaningful and significant patterns of cumulation are elaborated by the researcher from word frequencies through iterative processes of subjective interpretation, as will be discussed in Chapter III and IV. Other patterns could have been identified and discussed. Patterns can therefore be apprehended “by way of the imagination or through statistics.”<sup>266</sup> Computational methods in humanistic research “can help bring the imagination in line with the statistical reality and vice versa.”<sup>267</sup> In topic modelling, the clusters of words that re-present patterns of regularity in dispersion are meaningfully interpreted as significant patterns by the analyst. Topics are in this sense not pre-given, but made meaningful as patterns of regularity by the analyst.<sup>268</sup> Computational methods may bring to light different configurations of statistical patterns, but these are not analyses in themselves. For example, Beye emphasises that

it becomes essential that those using topic models validate the description provided by a topic model by reference to something other than the topic model itself. Fortunately researchers familiar with the period, documents, and writers associated with a corpus typically have the expertise to devise appropriate checks.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> Paul A. Youngman and Ted Carmichael, ‘Big Data, Pattern Recognition, and Literary Studies: N-Gramming the Railway in Nineteenth-Century German Fiction’, in *Distant Readings: Topologies of German Culture in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Matt Erlin and Lynne Tatlock (Rochester, N.Y. and Woodbridge, Suffolk: Camden House, 2014), pp. 285–300 (p. 287).

<sup>267</sup> Youngman and Carmichael, p. 287.

<sup>268</sup> Niels Åkerstrøm Andersen, p. 8.

<sup>269</sup> Riddell, p. 108.

It is up to the researcher to identify meaningful patterns from the computational re-presentation of statistical patterns. As Anthony points out, developing analyses with computational approaches requires a corpus of texts, “software tools to extract the data in the first place,” and “human intuition (to interpret the data derived from corpora).”<sup>270</sup> Computational approaches, as conceptualised and performed in this project, are therefore primarily exploratory methods, they are used to stimulate and open up analytical possibilities, but they are not to be considered analyses in themselves.<sup>271</sup> This will be highlighted throughout the analyses in Chapter III and IV where I foreground how I elaborate meaningful semantic groupings in analysis from the computational re-presentation of statistical patterns. As Rhody argues:

It is incumbent upon us as digital humanists who use this methodology to explain that a topic with keywords like “night, light, moon, stars, day” isn’t just about time of day. More likely, it’s about the use of time of day as images, metaphors, and other figurative proxies for another conversation and none of that is evident without a combination of close and “networked” reading.<sup>272</sup>

Computational deformances stimulate a mode of engagement, a process of exploration, that however is only fully realised through the combination with other modes of analysis. For example, the terms of physicality that frequently occur across 1870s-1910s corpora in this project (as will be discussed in Chapter III-1), are not about physicality and the body *per se*, but rather are part of discursive resources and strategies for exploring and destabilising changing understandings and notions of

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<sup>270</sup> Anthony, p. 90.

<sup>271</sup> Underwood.

<sup>272</sup> Lisa Rhody, ‘Some Assembly Required: Understanding and Interpreting Topics in LDA Models of Figurative Language’, *Lisa Rhody*, 2012  
<http://web.archive.org/web/20160704150726/http://www.lisrhody.com:80/some-assembly-required/> [accessed 21 June 2018].

subjectivity. This can only be analytically developed through other modes of reading and interpretation. A valuable aspect of working with computational methods, therefore, is the possibilities afforded by these methods for radically reconfiguring and re-presenting the text. These deformances stimulate different modes of engagement with the material that can facilitate epistemological shifts and open up alternative analytical perspectives. These are therefore primarily exploratory strategies that aim to destabilise and multiple analytical possibilities rather than fix them.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I discussed how I consolidate an assemblage of theoretical and methodological resources in order to approach decadence in a theoretically and methodologically innovative way. This chapter therefore focused on the theoretical and methodological approach developed in this thesis, and the analytical and theoretical resources that are drawn on for reframing decadent ambiguity and liminality as process (re)signification. The fundamental ambiguous and liminal aspects constitutive of decadence at the fin de siècle can be reframed and reformulated as exposing and exploring processes of elaborating meaning — this suggests how decadence can be understood as providing strategies and resources for playing out processes of (re)signification, and how decadence can be theoretically and methodologically reframed in terms of process of (re)signification which opens up alternative analytical perspectives.

Systems theories, discussed in II-1, provide theoretical resources for formalising the interrelations and intersections of multifaceted phenomena as generative dynamics and process of change. The process of abstraction and formalisation that systems theory enables is a useful strategy for stimulating epistemological shifts and opening up alternative analytical perspectives. With the concepts of emergence and autopoiesis in particular, generative change can be conceptualised as recursively unfolding in processes of variation and repetition, liberation and constraint. The process of (re)signification in a systems perspective is not simply constituted from the addition and differentiation of signs, but rather generatively emerges from the systemic dynamics of interrelation and intersection of different aspects of meaningful elaboration. This enables me to address and reformulate in a flexibly and holistic way the liminality of decadence as playing out dynamics of change, and the ambiguity of decadence as structured along fundamental tensions and interrelations across different spheres and domains. Luhmann's systems theory of communication further provides more concrete and specialised theoretical resources for reframing the fundamental tensions that underpin the semantic force of decadence. The process of re-entry, as theorised by Luhmann, holds together destabilisation and restabilisation in the unfolding of processes of (re)signification. In re-entry the process of meaningful elaboration is unfolded through the tensions and interplay between self-reference and self-differentiation — unmarked sides within stabilised understandings (i.e. the field of meaningful possibilities not activated within stabilised understandings) are made visible and re-entered into these understandings in a processes that holds together coherence and change, repetition and variation.

Discourse theories, discussed in II-2, as systemic theories that focus specifically on language and meaning, develop and concretise further some to the theoretical



resources introduced through systems theories. The discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe is especially useful for theorising troubled times of acute metaphysical, social and cultural turmoil and crisis as particularly intense moments of negotiation and exploration of meaning and (re)signification. As a constructionist theory of language and meaning, discourse theory conceptualises the process of (re)signification as foundational cultural practice for elaborating shared social reality. In this way, constructionist discourse approaches hold together aspects of political, technological, social, cultural materiality and reality with the configuration and mediation of these aspects in language and meaning. Broad political, technological, social and cultural issues and events are deployed and made meaningful through language and meaning. Therefore, exploring the meaningful discursive configurations of these issues is exploring the elaboration of the shared social and cultural reality of the time. Discourse theory therefore re-ontologises the functional abstraction and formalisation of the process of (re)signification; discourse theory contextualises and substantiates the process of cumulation and interrelation as reformulation and elaboration of meaning, of shared cultural reality. Thus, discourse theory emerges as especially useful for addressing the issue of how to conceptualise decadence as particularly imbricated in the acute cultural reformulations and shifts taking place across different cultural spheres at the fin de siècle. In particular, the dilemmas of how to analytically conceptualise and explore decadence as both particularly tied to literary and artistic spheres, and as a significant concept in broader social and cultural issues of the fin de siècle can be productively articulated and held together in conceptualising decadence discursively as process of (re)signification and elaboration of meaning.

Times of crisis in discourse theory are theorised as when an array of meaningful possibilities in the field of discursivity (similar to Luhmann's unmarked sides) are made

visible and explored through their articulation into different meaningful configurations. The process of articulation destabilises stabilised meaning, and plays out combinations and interrelations of elements into new possibilities of meaningful configuration. Articulation is therefore unfolded through the twin tensions of liberation and constraint, and cumulation and interrelation. Meaning is conceptualised as stabilised regularities and as patterns in dispersions of possibilities. Meaning as shared cultural reality is substantiated and elaborated through shifting patterns of cumulation and interrelation.

In the third and final section of this chapter (II-3), I discussed how computational approaches to textual analysis can methodologically perform the theoretical insights of discourse theory and systems theory. Word frequency queries re-present patterns of cumulation by statistically fragmenting the corpora into frequent and recurrent words. Topic modelling visualises patterns of interrelation by statistically re-presenting words that frequently and recurrently occur close to one another across the corpora. These computational methods therefore allow me to re-present and reconfigure the texts as patterns of cumulation and interrelation that would otherwise remain unrepresentable, and which open up towards the analysis of recurring semantic tensions and patterns of self-reference and self-differentiation, repetition and variation across the corpora. Computational methods allow us to combine formalisation and substantiation of patterns of cumulation and interrelation, self-reference and self-differentiation. These computational deformances are therefore valuable analytical approaches for addressing issues of decadent ambiguity that relate to the particular diffuseness of the concept at the time by enabling the exploration of discursive theorisations of meaning as patterns of regularity in dispersion. In addition, computational deformances perform processes of abstraction and formalisation in their radical re-presenting and reconfiguration of the texts which, as discussed in relation to systems theory, stimulate

explorations of alternative analytical and epistemological perspectives as well as productive re-engagements with the materials of analysis. Finally, the particular malleability and flexibility of computational methodologies enable to perform a systemic and iterative analytical process that can enable to researcher to shift and move between different levels and lines of analysis.

In Chapters III and IV, I explore more concretely how decadence and be reformulated and analysed by deploying the analytical resources and methods as discussed throughout Chapter II. Chapter III will focus on corpora of literary and philosophical texts by Mann, Nietzsche, Söderberg and Strindberg written between the 1870s and 1910s. Computational deformances of these corpora identify patterns of semantic tensions, self-reference and self-differentiation, repetition and variation, cumulation and interrelation across these corpora. These suggest analytical perspectives that are developed further into more in-depth analyses of *Der Fall Wagner* by Nietzsche, *Tristan*, *Tonio Kröger* and *Der Tod in Venedig* by Mann, *Doktor Glas* by Söderberg and *I havsbandet* by Strindberg. Furthermore, particular theoretical resources (such as the process re-entry and field of discursivity, and meaning as processes of cumulation and interrelation) also contribute to the elaboration of more fine-grain analyses in Chapter III-2.

In Chapter IV, the patterns of discursive tensions, cumulations and interrelations across the 1870s-1910s corpora are compared with discursive patterns that emerge from a corpora of research literature on decadence in the German, Swedish and Comparative/European cultural contexts published between the 1920s and 2010s. This allows me to further reframe in terms of processes of (re)signification how decadence has been approached and conceptualised in previous research. Furthermore, the recurring patterns of self-reference and self-differentiation, cumulation and interrelation

are here more explicitly related to particular social and cultural shifts and negotiations taking place at the fin de siècle. Chapter III and IV therefore demonstrate the analytical perspectives and possibilities that can be opened up by reframing decadence as playing out processes of meaningful elaboration, and substantiate how this approach can be productively unfolded into particular analyses. Decadence is a particularly ambiguous and liminal concept at the fin de siècle, and it is precisely this ambiguity and liminality that constitutes its significance and meaningfulness at the fin de siècle. The semantic force of decadent ambiguity and liminality can be understood as providing strategies and resources for the destabilisation and exploration of meaningful possibilities. In this theoretical and methodological approach, I can conceptualise decadence as discursive resource and strategy that stimulate and play out processes of destabilisation and exploration, of articulation and re-entry. Luhmannian re-entry provides a framework for conceptualising the playing out of tensions in processes of signification. Discourse theory provides theoretical tools for conceptualising decadence as discursive resource, as opening up the field of discursivity, and participating in processes of articulation. Both of these approaches understand the dynamic process of meaningful elaboration as making visible excluded meaning through processes of destabilisation that become re-entered, restabilised and reformulated into different meaningful configurations. Decadence opens up meaningful possibilities and allows these to be played out. Furthermore, since decadence exposes and explores processes through which meaning is elaborated it also thereby exposes itself as a contingent process of elaboration.



## **Chapter III**

### **Gathering the Threads: Life of the Self 1870s-1910s**

#### **Introduction**

The approach to decadence developed throughout Chapters I and II conceptualises decadence as discursive resource and strategy that stimulate and play out processes of articulation and re-entry which fundamentally expose and explore processes through which meaning is elaborated. Decadence is therefore conceived as a resource and strategy for performing processes of (re)signification, and thereby exposes and makes visible processes of (re)signification (including the process of signification itself) as contingent processes of elaboration and construction. Chapter III explores the analytical perspectives and possibilities that can be brought to light when this approach is applied on corpora of texts from the 1870s and 1910s that relate to literary decadence. In the first section of this chapter (III-1), I explore what analytical insights can be gleaned on a broad scale of analysis, and these insights inform more close-scale fine-grain analyses discussed in the second section of this chapter (III-2).

In the first section of this chapter (III-1), I elaborate recurrent semantic groupings across the corpora (divided by author) from word frequency lists, and I compare these with topic models drawn from the corpora (divided by language). This allows me to develop an initial insight into the resources and strategies recurrent across the corpora of texts of literary decadence. The semantic groupings of frequent

words give a sense of the discursive resources and intersections at play across the corpora by re-presenting patterns of cumulation across the texts. These insights can be developed further through comparisons with topic models that provide additional insights into cumulative patterns of discursive configurations and interrelations playing out across the corpora. Particularly striking discursive resources and intersections that emerge from these analyses revolve around interrelating tensions between semantics of individuality and collectivity, interiority and exteriority, physicality and inwardness.

These insights, in combination with theoretical resources discussed in particular in Chapter II, stimulate the elaboration of close-scale fine-grain analyses in the second section of Chapter III (III-2). The theorisation of the process of (re)signification as unfolding in the re-entering of tensions between self-reference and self-differentiation can reframe the analysis of particular motifs and figures in Nietzsche's *Der Fall Wagner* and Mann's *Tristan* and *Tonio Kröger* as playing out processes of re-entry. These analyses become especially significant when considered in relation to recurrent tensions between individuality and collectivity as flagged up in the first section of this chapter. These exploratory and destabilising re-enterings probe different aspects of the tensions and renegotiations between collectivity and individuality playing out at the fin de siècle. Furthermore, these patterns of self-reference and self-differentiation, of repetition and variation, can be detected across different scales of analysis as they emerge not only within texts but also across texts. This is discussed in section III-2-A.

In Chapter II I also discussed theoretical insights into the process of (re)signification as involving tensions between cumulation and dispersion, liberation and constraint. The process of articulation, of elaboration of meaning, is theorised as unfolding through the twin pressures of cumulation, stabilisation and differentiation, destabilisation. These theoretical resources can open up further analytical perspectives

when considered in combination with analyses from the first section of Chapter III that identify tensions between physicality, space and inwardness. The unfolding of tensions between interiority and exteriority, physicality and inwardness, stimulates processes of destabilisation and exploration of different modes of expression. The re-entering of these tensions plays out experimentations with different aesthetic and meaningful practices in relation to art and subjectivity. Inward states are exteriorised. The sense of self and individuality are made meaningful through processes of cumulation, the self is substantiated through webs of cultural and intertextual references. Moreover, exterior landscapes and exterior events are only made accessible through the individual character's perception who, however, can only make sense through idiosyncratic cumulations and assemblages of cultural references and resources. The playing out of these tensions between interiority and exteriority can be understood as exploring tensions between realist and expressive modes of aesthetic and artistic practice. This is discussed in section III-2-B.

These analyses point toward how the resources and strategies of decadent literature therefore expose and explore the very process of (re)signification and meaningful elaboration itself. Recursive strategies make visible the process of (re)signification as contingent process of elaboration. This is fundamental to processes of (re)signification that rely on making visible and re-entering difference within self-reference. This is discussed in section III-2-C.

In this chapter I will therefore explore how theoretical perspectives from systems theory and discourse theory in combination with computational approaches for conceptualising and exploring processes of (re)signification can be productively incorporated into analyses of literature related to decadence in order open up analytical perspectives on how decadence can be understood as exploring and exposes



processes of destabilisation, exploration and reformulation across different cultural domains.

The texts that constitute the corpus relevant to this chapter include most of the production of Mann, Nietzsche, Söderberg and Strindberg between the 1870s and the 1910s. The main aim in constructing this corpus was to develop a broad corpus, both diversified yet coherent, and that would be widely accepted as representative of writing related to decadence at the fin de siècle in Germany and Sweden. (Refer to the Introduction (section 3) for additional information on the elaboration of the corpus, and to Appendix 1 for further bibliographical details on the sources contained within the corpus relevant to this chapter).

### **III - 1 - Discussion of word frequency lists and topic models of 1870s-1910s corpora**

In this section, I will be discussing some of the patterns identified when analysing word frequency lists and topic models drawn from the 1870s-1910s corpora of texts related to decadence. One of the purposes of this discussion is to give a sense of the interpretative process when working with these computational tools. It is an iterative process that involves the repeated filtering and refining of analytical insights through an oscillation and comparison between different scales of analysis, types of analysis and textual permutations. Even though I present the interpretative process as sequential steps, these analyses were elaborated through iterations between these different interpretative steps and types of analysis. I develop word frequency lists of different

sets and sub-sets of corpora — dividing the corpora by author was most relevant for these analysis as these corpora are still broad enough to explore significant cumulative patterns, but also particularised enough to explore significant differences and overlaps.<sup>1</sup> I compare the different word frequency lists for each corpus, and elaborate recurrent semantic groupings from frequent words across the corpora. These can be compared with topic models (in this case run on corpora divided by language so that the corpora are broad enough to reveal significant patterns) which provide a sense of frequent patterns of semantic clusters across the texts. The recurrent discursive configurations and intersections that emerge from these analyses inform the close reading analyses of particular texts within this corpus, and can be compared with the discursive configurations and intersections analysed in the 1920s-2010s corpora (discussed in Chapter IV).

Appendixes 5-10 contain the raw word frequency lists for corpora divided by author: appendixes 5 (exact) and 6 (stemmed) contains the original word frequency lists for the corpus of all texts by Mann; Appendixes 7 (exact) and 8 (stemmed) contains the raw word frequency lists for the corpus of all texts by Nietzsche; Appendix 9 contains the original word frequency lists for the corpus of all texts by Söderberg, and Appendix 10 contains the raw word frequency lists for the corpus of all texts by Strindberg. (Refer to the Introduction (section 2) for a reminder on stemmed and exact word frequency lists). Furthermore, it should be reminded that words that appear in word frequency lists or topic models will be marked in SMALL CAPS, in this way I can explicitly emphasise with an easy visual convention which words appear in the topic

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<sup>1</sup> In the process of developing these analyses I generated word frequency lists on corpora divided by language, author and for each individual text in the corpus. I did not include these in the appendixes since I do not discuss them directly in this thesis, but I am happy to provide the word frequency lists on request.

modelling and word frequency results. When discussing word frequency lists the frequency of the word will be listed next to the word in question: e.g. EYES (14th) means that the term “eyes” in this exact spelling is the 14th most frequent word in this particular corpus. The default is exact word frequency lists; if I am referring to the listing of EYES in a stemmed word frequency list I will specify “stemmed” after the listing number, e.g. EYES (14th and 12th stemmed) means that “eyes” is 14th most frequent word in this particular corpus, and “eyes” and related words (e.g. “eye”) are the 12th most frequent group of words in this particular corpus. When multiple words are listed together the order of the words is reflected in the order of the frequency listings e.g. HUVUDET/HUVUD (151st/262nd) means that “huvudet” is the 151st most frequent word and “huvud” is the 262nd most frequent word in this particular corpus of text.

Appendix 3 shows how I refined the most frequently recurring words across the raw word frequency lists into significant semantic groupings. These provide the basis for the discussions of word frequency lists in this current section. The recurrent semantic groupings I identified are:

- parts of the body, terms relating to physicality and size;
- terms relating to movement, posture, positioning and space and spatiality;
- terms relating to interiors and exteriors, collectivity and individuality, social titles and roles and family structures and figures;
- terms relating to human experience, spirituality and religion, human and social values, expression and communication;
- terms of perception, apprehension and understanding;
- and semantics of time and temporality.

### III - 1 - A - Word Frequency

#### Parts of the body and physicality:

A particularly striking insight is how terms referring to parts of the body and physicality frequently recur across all corpora. EYES and HANDS are the most recurrent. In the Nietzsche corpus (the corpus containing the fewest body-related terms) STRONG (STARK (78th stemmed)) and STRENGTH (KRAFT (86th)) are particularly frequent, but EYES (AUGE/AUGEN (151st/152nd and 72nd stemmed)), HAND (HAND (195th)) and HEART (HERZE (206th)) are also relatively frequent.

The Mann corpus contains the most body-related terms. STRONG (STARK (202nd stemmed)) also appears here, but less frequently than in the Nietzsche corpus, and much less frequently compared to terms relating to specific parts of the body: EYES (AUGEN (14th and 16th stemmed)), HAND/HANDS (HAND/HÄNDE/HÄNDEN (19th/86th/240th and 12th stemmed)), HEAD (KOPF (50th)), FACE (GESICHT (57th)) and VOICE (STIMME (89th)) are particularly frequent, but also relatively frequent are HAIR (HAAR (166th)), NOSE (NASE (200th)), LIPS (LIPPEN (220th)), ARM (ARM (253rd)), CHEST (BRUST (259th)), FOREHEAD/BROW (STIRN (270th)), HEART (HERZ (277th)), MOUTH (MUND (279th)) and BACK (RÜCKEN (280th)).

BEAUTIFUL (SCHÖN/SCHÖNE (92nd stemmed)) also appears relatively frequently, and it is also a term that appears in the Söderberg corpus — BEAUTIFUL (VACKER/VACKRA (304th/309th)) — though not as frequently as in Mann. The Söderberg corpus also includes a number of terms related to specific body parts. Again EYE(S) (ÖGON/ÖGONEN (60th/125th)), HAND(S) (HAND/HANDEN/HÄNDER (133rd/222nd/312th)) and HEAD (HUVUDET/HUVUD (151st/262nd)) are strikingly frequent, as well as FACE

(ANSIKTE (167th)) and the terms VOICE (RÖST (254th)) and MOUTH (MUNNEN (387th)).

Rather than STRONG and STRENGTH, we find OLD (GAMLA/GAMMAL (54th/79th)), YOUNG (UNG (139th)) and DEAD (DÖD (299th)).

In the Strindberg corpus OLD (GAMLA/GAMMAL (75th/297th)) also features as a frequent term, as well as YOUNG (UNGA/UNG (224th/372nd)) and POORLY (ILLA (314th)). HAND (HAND/HANDEN (137th/279th)) is the most frequent body part in Strindberg, whilst FACE (ANSIKTE (229th)), EYE(S) (ÖGON/ÖGONEN (240th/243rd)) and HEAD (HUVUD/HUVUDET (335th/352nd)) are also frequent.

Terms relating to size also recur frequently across all corpora with similar frequency patterns. In the Mann corpus we find SMALL (KLEINEN/KLEINE (41st/63rd and 13th stemmed)) and BIG (GROßEN (68th and 21st stemmed)) with high and similar frequency, although SMALL/LITTLE is slightly more frequent. Similarly, in Söderberg, LITTLE (LITET/LITEN/LILLA (33rd/59th/109th)); SMALL (SMÅ (156th)) and BIG (STORA/STORT (74th/287th)) have relatively similar and high frequencies through the terms LITTLE and SMALL are slightly more frequent than BIG. In the Nietzsche corpus, however, BIG (GROßEN/GROßE (48th/75th and 17th stemmed)) is much more frequent than SMALL (KLEINEN (229th and 84th stemmed)). And we find a similar pattern in Strindberg, though not as marked, where BIG (STORA/STOR/STORT (54th/123rd/234th)) is more frequent than LITTLE (LILLA/LITET/LITEN (150th/182nd/200th)) or SMALL (SMÅ (166th)). This tension between BIG and SMALL constitutes an interesting point of comparison: in Chapter I I discussed Kafitz's list of features of literary decadence, and one of the aspects he enumerated was a certain propensity for the "Ungeheur[en] nd Schrankenlos[en]"<sup>2</sup> (tremendous and extreme). These word frequency analyses

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<sup>2</sup> Kafitz, *Dekadenz.*, p. 15.

suggest more a tension between scales, except in relation to Nietzsche. This could point towards a potential analytical avenue to explore further.

### **Movement, posture, positioning, space and spatiality:**

Another divergence between the Nietzsche corpus and the other corpora centres around terms of movement and positioning. Words of movement are not frequent compared to other terms in the Nietzsche corpus. In the Mann corpus, we can identify a few terms of high frequency related to movement such as WENT (GING (40th)), CAME (KAM (49th)), and terms of positioning such as STOOD (STAND (29th)), THERE (DORT (55th)), HELD (HIELT (76th)), SAT (SAß (103rd)), FAR/WIDE/LARGE (WEIT (105th and 52nd stemmed)), LAY (LAG (107th)) and SIDE (SEITE (117th)). MOVEMENT (BEWEGUNG (233rd and 144th stemmed)) itself is referred to explicitly relatively frequently, as well as terms of posture such as STEP (SCHRITT (266th and 143rd stemmed)) and BEARING/POSTURE/STANCE (HALTUNG (268th)).

The Strindberg corpus also contains a number of frequent terms relating to movement with verbs such as WENT (GICK/GÅTT (16th/122nd)), COME (KOM/KOMMER/KOMMA/KOMMIT (20th/69th/70th/117th)), ROSE/STEPPED (STEG (143rd)), FELL (FÖLL (231st)), TURNED (VÄNDE (298th)), and prepositions and adverbs such as UP (UPP/OPP (10th/125th)), DURING or BELOW (UNDER (14th)), TOWARDS/AGAINST (MOT (17th)), DOWN (NER (28th)), AWAY or OUGHT (BORT (99th)), FROM (IFRÅN (145th)), OUT (UTE (161st)), BACK (TILLBAKA (181st)) and BACK/AGAIN (ÅTER (192nd)). We can also identify, as in the Mann corpus, frequent terms of standstill and positioning such as SAT (SATT/SATTE/SITTA (67th/159th/228th)), LAY (LÅG (88th)), PLACED/SET or WAY/MANNER (SÄTT (135th)) and STAND (STÅ (215th)). A particularity to both the Strindberg and Söderberg corpora is the relative frequency of the verb SEARCH/LOOK FOR/TRIED

(SÖKA/SÖKTE (205th/220th)) in the Strindberg corpus and SEARCHED/LOOKED FOR/TRIED (SÖKTE (296th)) in the Söderberg corpus.

The Strindberg and Söderberg corpora are very similar concerning terms of movements and standstill, with terms of movement perhaps slightly more numerous and frequent in Söderberg — WENT (GICK/GÅTT/GINGO (7th/126th/291st)), COME (KOM/KOMMER/KOMMA/KOMMIT (15th/51st/66th/83rd)), ROSE/STEPPED (STEG (134th)), FALL or CASE (FALL (137th)), FELL (FÖLL (176th)), TURNED (VÄNDE (196th)), TRAVELLED/RAISED (RESTE (237th)) — including prepositions and adverbs related to movement and positioning such as UP (UPP (10th)), BELOW (UNDER (23rd)), TOWARDS/AGAINST (MOT (28th)), AWAY (BORT/BORTA (56th/121st)), DOWN (NED/NER (88th/159th)), PAST/BY (FÖRBI (89th)), BACK/AGAIN (ÅTER (97th)), OUT (UTE (173rd)), BACK (TILLBAKA (194th)) and IN/INSIDE (INNE (284th)). Terms of standstill such as SAT/SIT (SATT/SATTE/SITTER/SITTA (42nd/231st/242nd/295th)); LAY/LIE (LÅG/LIGGER (68th/278th)); STOPPED/STAYED (STANNADE (170th)); PLACED/SET or WAY/MANNER (SÄTT (193rd)); STAND (STÅR (225th)) also constitute a frequent and recurrent semantic cluster.

The sparsity of words of positioning, movement and standstill in the Nietzsche corpus compared to the other corpora relate to divergences in terms of genre, but this does not mean that terms of movement and positioning and standstill are not significant. The frequency of these terms indicate realistic descriptions of how characters are positioned and moving, but the particular intersections of these terms with frequent terms of physicality and body part (as discussed above) and of exteriority and interiority (as will be discussed below) may point towards the particular significance of movement and positioning in these texts (this will be discussed in section III-2-B). Although the higher frequency of prepositions and adverbs related to movement in the

Strindberg and Söderberg corpora compared to the Mann and Nietzsche corpora might have to do with less precise stop-word lists in Swedish compared to German (a more stringent stop-word list might filter out prepositions and adverbs related to movement as too common to be significant and meaningful), we can nevertheless identify, particularly in combination with the higher number and frequency of words of movements and standstill, a particular significance of movement and standstill in connection to notions of exploration and searching in the Strindberg and Söderberg corpora, and perhaps even more marked in Söderberg. The meanderings of Doctor Glas in *Doktor Glas* around the city of Stockholm can be considered a spatialisation of his mental ruminations. Ewbank also notes the importance of the “notion of art as a ‘search’,” as process of exploration in relation to Strindberg.<sup>3</sup>

**Interiors and exteriors, collectivity and individuality, social titles and roles, family structures and figures:**

Terms of movement and standstill as well as terms of space and spatiality overlap in many ways with the semantic of interiors and exteriors which also constitutes a striking pattern of repetition and differentiation across these corpora. Across the Söderberg, Strindberg and Mann corpora we find similar patterns of semantics of inwardness, psychological interiority and isolation<sup>4</sup> as well as terms of physical interiors, and terms relating to the exteriors and the outdoors (relating to urban and natural environments).

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<sup>3</sup> Ewbank, p. 48.

<sup>4</sup> Frequent terms of perception, understanding and self-reflection also relate to inwardness but are not discussed here, cf. further below for a discussion of these terms.



In Strindberg, the notions of SELF (SJÄLV/SJÄLVA (26th/239th)) and ALONE (ENSAM (175th)) are particularly frequent, and the terms IN/INSIDE (INNE (250th)) and SOUL (SJÄL (270th)) are also relatively frequent. We also find terms of physical interiority with HOME (HEM/HEMMA (127th/249th)), ROOM (RUM/RUMMET (140th/189th)), HOUSE (HUSET (241st)), TABLE (BORDET (299th)), and terms referring to thresholds such as DOOR (DÖRREN (228th)) and WINDOW (FÖNSTRET (384th)) which occur in similar number and frequency as terms of exteriors such as OUT (UTE (161st)), WORLD (VÄRLDEN (211st)), WAY/PATH (VÄG (246th)), SUN (SOLEN (249th)), NATURE (NATUREN (381st)) and STREET (GATAN (386th)).

The terms SELF (SELBST (33rd)) and ALONE (ALLEIN (92nd)) are also frequent in the Mann corpus, and we find a similar tension between domestic interiors — with terms such as HOUSE (HAUSE/HAUS (101st/206th and 45th stemmed)), CASTLE (SCHLOSS (130th)), ROOM (ZIMMER (158th)); and TABLES (TISCHE (284th)) — threshold spaces — with WINDOW (FENSTER (197th)) and DOOR (TÜR (212th)) — and exteriors — with TOWN/CITY (STADT (66th)), WORLD (WELT (141st)), AIR (LUFT (237th)) and STREET (STRASSE (303rd)).

In strikingly similar frequency patterns to Mann and Strindberg, SELF (SJÄLV (21st)), ALONE (ENSAM (131st)) and IN/INSIDE (INNE (284th)) also appear as frequent terms in the Söderberg corpus. A similar tension also emerges between terms relating to domestic interiors with HALL (HALL (117th)), HOME (HEM/HEMMA (138th/239th)), ROOM (RUMMET/RUM (187th/263rd)) and HOUSE (HUS (200th)), and terms of thresholds such as WINDOW (FÖNSTRET/FÖNSTER (165th/318th)) and DOOR (DÖRREN (232nd)), and terms relating to exteriors with SUN (SOLEN (122nd)), STREET (GATAN (144th)), WORLD (VÄRLDEN (148th)), WAY/PATH (VÄG/VÄGEN (152nd/163rd)), OUT (UTE (173rd)) and TOWN/CITY (STADEN (228th)).

This tension between interiors and exteriors is echoed in a similar tension between individuality and collectivity which recurs across all corpora. It is particularly relevant to note that there is a smaller variety of terms that refer to individuality compared to terms of collectivity, but the terms of individuality are usually fewer but more frequent whereas terms relating to collectivity and society are more numerous, but often slightly less frequent individually than terms of individuality. Furthermore, terms of individuality are usually terms that signify individuality through self-reflection or self-differentiation.

Terms that relate to individuality in the Mann corpus include SELF (SELBST (33rd)), KIND (ART (80th)), ALONE (ALLEIN (92nd)) and PERSON (PERSON (162nd stemmed)). Whilst terms of collectivity include US (UNS (62nd)), PEOPLE (LEUTE (127th and 122nd stemmed)), WORLD (WELT (141st)), PAIR/COUPLE (PAAR (144th)), SOCIETY (GESELLSCHAFT (172nd stemmed)), HUMANS/HUMAN (MENSCHEN/MENSCH (182nd/263rd) and TOGETHER (ZUSAMMEN (187th)).

In the Söderberg corpus, terms that relate to individuality are similar to the terms in Mann with SELF (SJÄLV (21st)), ALONE (ENSAM (131st)) and CASE (FALL (137th)). Terms of reciprocity and collectivity are also rather similar to Mann with PAIR/COUPLE (PAR (72nd)), EACH OTHER (VARANDRA (105th)), WORLD (VÄRLDEN (148th)), PEOPLE (MÄNNISKOR (181st)) and COMPANY/SOCIETY (SÄLLSKAP (377th)).

In the Nietzsche corpus terms of collectivity and individuality follow slightly different frequency patterns compared to the other corpora: SELF (SELBST/SELBER (10th/21st and 9th stemmed)), UNIQUE (EINMALIG (49th stemmed)) and ALONE (ALLEIN (129th)) are frequent terms that relate to individuality. Terms of collectivity in Nietzsche, however, appear with a similar high frequency to terms of individuality: HUMANS/HUMAN/HUMANITY (MENSCHEN/MENSCH/MENSCHHEIT (8th/23rd/104th and 6th

stemmed)), WORLD (WELT (26th)), GERMAN/GERMAN (DEUTSCHEN/DEUTSCHE (77th/217th)), OUR (UNSERE/UNSER/UNSRE (154th/155th/159th and 7th stemmed)), VOLK (183rd and 74th stemmed)) and SOCIETY (GESELLSCHAFT (196th)).

KIND in the Mann corpus, UNIQUE in the Nietzsche corpus and CASE in the Söderberg corpus are particularly relevant for thinking through the tensions between collectivity and individuality. UNIQUE, is a term which denotes clear singularity, whilst CASE also signals singularity but as representative of a broader collectivity. Similarly, KIND signals particularity, but within the framework and with reference to collectivity.

In the Strindberg corpus SELF (SJÄLV/SJÄLVA (26th/239th)), ALONE (ENSAM (175th)) and PERSON/HUMAN BEING (MÄNNISKA (196th)) are frequent terms (particularly SELF). Whilst terms that refer to collectivity such as PEOPLE/HUMAN BEINGS (MÄNNISKOR (151st)), WORLD (VÄRLDEN (211st)), PAIR/COUPLE (PAR (232nd)), PEOPLE/FOLK/NATION (FOLK (254th)), COMPANY/SOCIETY (SÄLLSKAP (264th)) and SOCIETY (SAMHÄLLET (334th)) are more numerous but less frequent. NAME recurs in both the Söderberg — NAME (NAMN (211th)) — and Strindberg — NAME (NAMN (146th)) — corpora. As in the case of UNIQUE, KIND and CASE, NAME also signals a particular tension between collectivity and singularity in that it is an agreed-upon social convention, a communal convention, to denote and ascribe singularity and uniqueness.

These semantic and conceptual tensions and intersections between terms of collectivity and of individuality are declined along a spectrum of different configurations. Different kinds of relations and ways of relating are suggested as, for example, in Nietzsche with GERMAN/GERMAN (DEUTSCHEN/DEUTSCHE (77th/217th)) and VOLK (183rd and 74th stemmed)), as well as PEOPLE/FOLK/NATION (FOLK (254th)) in the Strindberg corpus suggests the emerging sense of relating to others as a nation. In Strindberg, FRIEND(S) (VÄN/VÄNNER (136th/276th)) and COMPANY/SOCIETY (SÄLLSKAP (264th))

suggests a different kind of exploration and negotiation of collectivity and individuality at the interpersonal and individual level. In Söderberg we also find the terms FRIEND (VÄN (347th)) and COMPANY/SOCIETY (SÄLLSKAP (377th)), and terms such as (AN)OTHER (ANNAN/ANNAT (76th/77th)), BETWEEN (MELLAN (114th)), AMONG (BLAND (123rd)), EACH OTHER (VARANDRA (105th)) and FOREIGN/STRANGE (FRÄMMANDE (245th)) which hint further at the negotiations and explorations of different ways of relating to one another.

Terms that suggest social roles, and societal expectations or institutions are another grouping of frequent words that relate to negotiations between communality and individuality. These are more recurrent in the Nietzsche corpus in particular with terms such as POWER (MACHT (25th)), MORAL (MORAL (71st and 47th stemmed)), RIGHT (RECHT (74th and 58th stemmed)) and CULTURE (KULTUR (78th)), but these terms are also frequent in the Strindberg corpus although with a different focus with words such as OUGHT or AWAY (BORT (99th)), RIGHT/STRAIGHT/COURSE/DISH (RÄTT (104th)), WORK/EMPLOYMENT (ARBETE (186th)), SCHOOL (SKOLA (283rd)) and MONEY (PENGAR (289th)). Terms that relate to social institutions in the Söderberg corpus are only relatively frequent with RIGHT/STRAIGHT/COURSE/DISH (RÄTT (102nd)), RIGHT/PROPER/REAL (RIKTIGT (186th)) and MONEY (PENGAR (274th)). In Mann only RIGHT (RECHT (115th)) might fit in this context.

This leads us to another configuration of tensions between individuality and collectivity in the frequency of terms relating to social titles, roles and family structures and figures. Again, the Nietzsche corpus differs in comparison to the other three corpora here in that there are fewer terms that refer to social roles, but the figures of ARTIST (KÜNSTLER (126th)), PHILOSOPHERS (PHILOSOPHEN (131st)) and POET (DICHTER (239th)) are frequent.

Terms relating to family figures and roles recur across the Strindberg corpus — CHILD (BARN (73rd)), FATHER (FADREN (218th)), WIFE (HUSTRU (219th)) and MOTHER (MODREN (374th)) — the Söderberg corpus — CHILD (BARN (107th)), WIFE (HUSTRU (307th)) and FATHER (FADERN (341st)) — and the Mann corpus with FATHER (VATER (82nd and 70th stemmed)), MOTHER (MUTTER (96th and 127th stemmed)), FAMILY (FAMILIE (133rd)), CHILD (KIND (155th)), DAUGHTER (TOCHTER (195th)), BROTHER (BRUDER (234th)) and SON (SOHN (283rd)). Family terms are particularly relevant as a central bourgeois institution that functions as the foundation and framework for the growth and development of the self.

Another bourgeois social practice, the use of social titles of respectable and polite address, is also recurrent with, for example, in the Söderberg corpus MRS./WIFE (FRU (108th)), MAN/GENTLEMAN/MASTER/MR. (HERRE/HERR (180th/261st)) and MISS (FRÖKEN (205th)), and in the Mann corpus SIR (HERR (9th)), MRS./WOMAN/WIFE (FRAU (25th)), MISS/YOUNG LADY (FRÄULEIN (128th)); and MAJESTY/HIGHNESS (HOHEIT (172nd)). In fact, the concept of NAMES/TITLES (NAMEN (199th and 149th stemmed)) even features explicitly in the Mann corpus, and, as mentioned previously, NAME is also a frequent concept in Strindberg, NAMN (146th), and Söderberg, NAMN (211th)). Social titles that relate to social roles, typifications and professions also recur throughout the corpora. In Mann we find the titles CONSUL (KONSUL (31st)), DOCTOR (DOKTOR (43rd)) and SENATOR (SENATOR (95th)). DOCTOR (DOKTOR (340th)) is also relatively frequent in Söderberg corpus as well as PRIEST (PRÄSTEN (321st)). In Strindberg we find SIR/SCHOOLTEACHER/MASTER (MAGISTERN (119th)), ADMINISTRATOR/CURATOR/SUPERINTENDENT (INTENDENTEN (252nd)), GYPSY (ZIGENAREN (267th)), PRIEST (PASTORN (274th)) and DOCTOR (DOKTORN (312th)). Finally, we also find terms relating to gender roles such as in Strindberg MAN (MANNEN (120th)), WOMAN

(KVINNA/KVINNAN (238th/255th)) and GIRL (FLICKAN (281st)). In the Söderberg corpus, GIRL (FLICKA (300th)) is relatively frequent, and in Mann GIRL (MÄDCHEN (226th)) and BOY (JUNGEN/JUNGE (227th/235th and 71st stemmed)) are also relatively frequent.

We can therefore see the recurrence of patterns of semantic tensions and conceptual couplings that echo across different contexts and domains. In the semantics of spaces there are tensions between interiority, interiors and exteriors; in the semantics of self and other there are tensions between notions of self, individuality and collectivity and social expectations and roles. These patterns and echoes may also configure and intersect with other semantic fields and groupings as will be explored in subsequent sections.

### **Human experience, spirituality and religion, human and social values, expression and communication:**

As noted previously, the Nietzsche corpus diverges in a number of respects with the other corpora: terms of domestic and urban interiors and exteriors and terms of social titles and roles are not frequent in the Nietzsche corpus compared to the other corpora. Rather, terms of spiritual interiors and natural exteriors recur such as SELF (SELBST/SELBER (10th/21st and 9th stemmed)), SOUL (SEELE (42nd)), NATURE (NATUR (47th and 46th stemmed)), SPIRIT (GEIST/GEISTES (70th/199th and 35th stemmed)) and FEELING (GEFÜHL (175th)). There is a slight overlap with the Strindberg corpus where SOUL (SJÄL (270th)) and NATURE (NATUREN (381st)) also appear, but less frequently and markedly compared to the Nietzsche corpus. As noted above, in Nietzsche, family structures and figures as well as social titles and roles are far less numerous and frequent compared to the other corpora. Instead, the figures of ARTIST (KÜNSTLER (126th)), PHILOSOPHERS (PHILOSOPHEN (131st)) and POET (DICHTER (239th)) are

frequent. Terms related to physicality and body parts also exhibit different patterns in the Nietzsche corpus compared to other corpora. In Nietzsche, the terms related to body parts are more general and conceptual terms rather than descriptive terms. Similarly, there are fewer descriptive terms of movement and positions in Nietzsche, and we find instead conceptual terms of spatiality.

The Nietzsche corpus therefore revolves around broader, more paradigmatic conceptualisations and visions of human experiences, spirituality and values, whereas the Mann, Söderberg and Strindberg corpora are more localised and anchored in particular settings of social life, and with Strindberg sometimes overlapping with Nietzsche in some respects. This relates to distinctions of genre between the Nietzsche corpora and the other corpora. Nietzsche is writing philosophical and cultural critical texts, whereas the texts in the Mann, Söderberg and Strindberg corpora are literary texts. Areas of overlap and differentiation can however be suggestive of productive avenues of analysis and provide indications of higher-level discursive tensions and negotiations at play across the corpora. For example, it must be emphasised that key aspects of human experience frequently recur across all corpora, namely notions of SELF, LIFE, LOVE, FEELING and WANT/WILL.

In the Mann corpus, SELF (SELBST (33rd) and LIFE (LEBEN (38th)) are particularly frequent as well as WANT/WANT/WILL/WANT (WILL/WOLLEN (118th/156th)) and LOVE (LIEBE (120th and 58th stemmed)) with HAPPINESS/LUCK (GLÜCK (216th)) and FELT (FÜHLTE (282nd)) also relatively frequent. In Söderberg, similarly to the Mann corpus, SELF (SJÄLV (21st)), SENSE/FEEL/KNOW (KÄNDE/KÄNNER (39th/177th)), WANTED/WANT/WILL (VILLE/VILL/VILJA (43rd/47th/208th)) and LIFE (LIV/LIVET (96th/141st)) feature prominently as well as LOVE (ÄLSKADE (290th)) and HAPPINESS (LYCKA (343rd)), and we also find SCARED (RÄDD (285th)). SELF (SJÄLV (26th)), WANTED/WANT/WILL

(VILLE/VILL/VILJA (18th/44th/173rd)), SENSE/FEEL/KNOW (KÄNDE/KÄNNER/KÄNNA (47th/130th/226th)), and LIFE (LIV/LIVET (90th/96th)) are also very frequent in the Strindberg corpus, and, similarly to Söderberg, POORLY (ILLA (314th)), SCARED (RÄDD (315th)) and LOVE (KÄRLEK (379th)) also appear as relatively frequent.

In the Nietzsche corpus, whilst we also find the concepts of LIFE (LEBEN/LEBENS (17th/85th and 15th stemmed)), LOVE (LIEBE (52nd and 41st stemmed)), HAPPINESS (GLÜCK (109th)), WILL (WILLE/WILLEN (143rd/146th and 14th stemmed)) and FEELING (GEFÜHL (175th)); other frequent aspects of human experience also emerge such as PLEASURE/PASSION (LUST (102nd)), BEING (WESEN (114th)), NECESSARY (NÖTIG (133rd)), SUFFERING (LEIDEN (178th)), DISTRESS/HARDSHIP/NECESSITY (NOT (240th)) and REVENGE (RACHE (244th)).

The Nietzsche corpus also contains a larger number of terms with high frequency that relate to terms of human and social values. Semantics of human and social values in the other corpora revolve around notions of GOOD (GOTT/GOD/GODA (109th/180th/248th)) and BETTER (BÄTTRE (177th)) in the Strindberg corpus; GOOD (GUT/GUTEN (59th/291st and 24th stemmed)), RIGHT (RECHT (115th)) and TRUE (WAHR (300th)) in the Mann corpus, and all notions are evident in the Söderberg corpora with GOOD (GOTT/GOD (179th/199th)), RIGHT/PROPER/REAL (RIKTIGT (186th)), BETTER (BÄTTRE (267th)) and TRUE (SANT (258th)). In Nietzsche, as well as TRUTH (WAHRHEIT (43rd)), GOOD (GUT/GUTEN/GUTE (46th/93rd/147th and 18th stemmed)) and RIGHT (RECHT (74th and 58th stemmed)) we also find further notions of MORALITY (MORAL (71st and 47th stemmed)), CULTURE (KULTUR (78th)), VIRTUE (TUGEND (101st)), WORTH (WERT (140th)), EVIL (BÖSE (161st)), THREAT/DANGER (GEFAHR (185th and 82nd stemmed)), BEST (BESTEN (214th)) and FREEDOM (FREIHEIT (221st)).



Similar patterns can be identified by considering the semantics of spirituality and religion. In the Söderberg, Strindberg and Mann corpora notions of spirituality and religion revolve around GOD (GOTT (46th)), GOOD (GUT/GUTEN (59th/291st and 24th stemmed)) and BELIEVE (GLAUBEN (183rd stemmed)) in the Mann corpus; BELIEVE (TROR/TRODDE (103rd/128th)), GOD (GUD (153rd)), GOOD (GOTT/GOD (179th/199th)), FAITH (TRO (264th)) and PRIEST (PRÄSTEN (321st)) in the Söderberg corpus; GOOD (GOTT/GOD/GODA (109th/180th/248th)), BELIEF/FAITH (TRO (115th)), GOD (GUD (153rd)), SOUL (SJÄL (270th)) and PRIEST (PASTORN (274th)) in the Strindberg corpus. Whereas in the Nietzsche corpus, alongside notions of SOUL (SEELE (42nd)), GOOD (GUT/GUTEN/GUTE (46th/93rd/147th and 18th stemmed)), GOD (GOTT/GOTTES (58th/248th and 39th stemmed)), BELIEF (GLAUBEN/GLAUBE (60th/165th and 42nd stemmed)) and SPIRIT (GEIST/GEISTES (70th/199th and 35th stemmed)) we also find EVIL (BÖSE (161st)) and CHRISTIANITY (CHRISTENTUM (220th)). Furthermore, we could be reminded here that rather than DOCTOR, PRIEST, SCHOOLMASTER or CONSUL, frequent figures in Nietzsche are ARTIST (KÜNSTLER (126th)), PHILOSOPHERS (PHILOSOPHEN (131st)) and POET (DICHTER (239th)).

This leads us to the semantic grouping of human expression and communication. The Strindberg, Söderberg and Mann corpora again appear as mediating realistic social, bourgeois and domestic settings by foregrounding terms of conversation and communication such as: SAID/SAY (SADE/SÄGA/SÄGER/SAGT (51st/60th/95th/284th) in Strindberg, SADE/SÄGA/SAGT/SÄGER (9th/61st/212th/218th) in Söderberg, and SAGTE/SAGEN (6th/60th/) in Mann); SPEAK/TALK (TALA/TALADE (93rd/155th) in Strindberg, TALADE/TALA (145th/162nd) in Söderberg and SPOKE (SPRACH (116th) in Mann); WORD (ORD/ORDET (94th/300th) in Strindberg, ORD (150th) in Söderberg and WORT/WORTE (163rd/196th and 56th stemmed) in Mann);

ASKED/QUESTION (FRÅGADE/FRÅGA (86th/247th) in Strindberg, FRÅGADE/FRÅGA (94th/301st) in Söderberg, and ASKED (FRAGTE (98th) and QUESTION (FRAGE (245th) in Mann); WHY (VARFÖR (80th) in Strindberg, VARFÖR (119th) in Söderberg and WARUM (252nd) in Mann), and finally ANSWERED (SVARADE (65th) in Strindberg, (SVARADE (53rd) in Söderberg, and ANTWORTETE (161st) in Mann).

In the Nietzsche corpus, terms relating to conversation are also frequent with SAY/SAID (SAGEN/GESAGT (73rd/208th)), SPOKE (SPRACH (172nd)), TALK (REDEN (118th)) and QUESTION (FRAGE (204th)), but the differences are that they are not ANSWERED in Nietzsche. WORD(S) become CONCEPT (BEGRIFF (176th)) and CALLED (HEIßT (64th)) is a frequent term. A further divergence is that in the Nietzsche corpus there are a number of terms that relate to ART (KUNST (39th)) with MUSIC (MUSIK (56th)), ARTIST (KÜNSTLER (126th)), POET (DICHTER (239th)), GREEKS (GRIECHEN (246th)) and TRAGEDY (TRAGÖDIE (250th)). Although there are no terms explicitly relating to art in the other corpora, we can note that EXPRESSION (AUSDRUCK (168th)) in the Mann corpus is a frequent term.

### **Terms of perception, apprehension, understanding and questioning:**

As discussed above, the generic and stylistic distinctions between the Nietzsche corpus and the other corpora are visible in the repetitions and variations of word frequencies. The Nietzsche corpus does not focus particularly strongly on domestic and interior settings, nor on descriptive physicality, but more on paradigmatic human experiences. The corpora do however share a recurrent frequency of semantics of shared human experience, spirituality and human and social values, even if there are differences between the Nietzsche corpus and the other corpora in terms of focus and emphasis. Similarly, we can identify overlaps across the corpora in terms of semantics of human perception, apprehension and understanding, but again with

slightly different emphases between the corpora of Söderberg, Mann and Strindberg compared to the Nietzsche corpus. The differences in emphases relate in particular to different kinds of perception and the previously-mentioned semantic field of parts of the body, namely the particular frequency of EYES, across all corpora — EYES (AUGE/AUGEN (151st/152nd and 72nd stemmed)) in the Nietzsche corpus, EYES (AUGEN (14th and 16th stemmed)) in the Mann corpus, EYE(S) (ÖGON/ÖGONEN (60th/125th)) in the Söderberg corpus and EYE(S) (ÖGON/ÖGONEN (240th/243rd)) in the Strindberg corpus. In Strindberg, Söderberg and Mann, semantics of perception are more frequent which highlight the tensions between physicality and inwardness, whereas in Nietzsche more general terms of understanding, questioning and reflecting are more frequent.

The Söderberg corpus contains the largest number of most frequent terms relating to perception with SEE (SÅG/SER/SETT (13th/84th/114th)), LOOK/GLANCE/GAZE (BLICK (198th)), STARE (STIRRADE (206th)), LOOK/CONTEMPLATE (BETRAKTADE (220th)), SEEMED/APPEARED (TYCKTES (247th)) as well as HEAR (HÖRDE/HÖRA (111th/240th)) and SENSE/FEEL/KNOW (KÄNDE/KÄNNER (39th/177th)). There are also a number of terms of reflection such as KNOW (VET/VISSTE/VETA (50th/106th/164th)), THINK (TÄNKTE/TÄNKA/TÄNKER (65th/147th/270th)), BELIEVE (TROR/TRODDE (103rd/128th)), THINK (TYCKTE/TYCKER (154th/279th)), READ/STUDIED (LÄSTE (223rd)), THOUGHTS (TANKAR (226th)), UNDERSTOOD (FÖRSTOD (256th)) and FORGOT (GLÖMT (277th)).

We find similar frequencies in Strindberg's corpus where SEE (SÅG/SER/SETT (21st/66th/97th)) and SENSE/FEEL/KNOW (KÄNDE/KÄNNER/KÄNNA (47th/130th/226th)) are frequent as well as HEAR (HÖRDE/HÖRA/HÖR/HÖRT (116th/147th/202nd/271st)), SEEMED (TYCKTES (216th)) and IMPRESSION (INTRYCK (378th)). Terms of understanding such as KNOW (VET/VISSTE/VETA (53rd/102nd/184th)), BELIEVE (TROR/TRODDE (81st/121st)), THOUGHTS (TANKAR (148th)), THOUGHT (TYCKTE (149th)), READ/STUDY (LÄSA/LÄSTE

(176th/204th)), THOUGHT (TÄNKTE/TÄNKA (197th/235th)) and UNDERSTOOD (FÖRSTOD (296th)) are also relatively frequent.

In the Mann corpus we can also identify a number of recurrent terms that relate to perception. Again SAW/SEE (SAH/SEHEN (36th/69th and 49th stemmed)) is particularly frequent, as well as GLANCED/LOOKED (BLICKTE (100th)), SEEMED/SHONE (SCHIEN (110th)), GLANCE/GLIMPSE/VIEW (BLICK (142nd)) and APPEARED (ERSCHIEN (247th)). Most terms in this category in the Mann corpus relate to perception (particularly visual perception). There are fewer terms of understanding and reflection, but KNOW/KNEW (WEIß/WUßTE/WISSEN (67th/148th/152nd)), BELIEVE (GLAUBEN (183rd stemmed)) and FELT (FÜHLTE (282nd)) are frequent.

The Nietzsche corpus does not include as many frequent terms related to perception. Although SEE/SEES (SEHEN/SIEHT (108th/193rd)) is still frequent as well as SEEM/SHINE (SCHEINT (156th)), there are more frequent terms that relate to understanding and thinking and reflection such as BELIEF (GLAUBEN/GLAUBE (60th/165th and 42nd stemmed)), KNOW/KNEW (WISSEN/WIEß/GEWISSEN (80th/94th/111th)), CERTAINTY (GEWISSHEIT (88th stemmed)), THINK/THOUGHT (DENKEN/GEDANKEN (116th/149th and 71st stemmed)), INSIGHT/PERCEPTION/KNOWLEDGE (ERKENNTNIS (124th)) and UNDERSTAND (VERSTEHEN (157th)). There is also a recurrence of terms that revolve around the conceptual coupling of REASON (VERNUNFT (189th)) and FEELING (GEFÜHL (175th)), SENSES/SENSES (SINNE/SINN (170th/173rd and 75th stemmed)), INSTINCT (INSTINKT (228th)). Another divergence in the Nietzsche corpus compared to the other corpora is the frequency of terms that relate to intellectual disciplines namely SCIENCE (WISSENSCHAFT (100th and 85th stemmed)) and PHILOSOPHERS/PHILOSOPHY (PHILOSOPHEN/PHILOSOPHIE

(131st/139th)). These divergences further relate to the distinctions of genre between Nietzsche and the other corpora as discussed previously.

### **Time and temporality:**

Terms that constitute the semantics of time and temporality across these corpora suggest an interweaving of different kinds and shades of temporalities. In the Söderberg corpus, TIME (TIDEN/TID (73rd/131st)) is itself a frequent concept. We can identify a number of terms that relate to time on the scale of life and living, such as BECOME (BLEV/BLI/BLIVIT/BLIR (26th/48th/78th/93rd)), OLD (GAMLA/GAMMAL (54th/79th)), LIFE (LIV/LIVET (96th/141st)), YOUNG (UNG (139th)), DEAD (DÖD (299th)) and LIVE (LEVA (315th)). There are also terms that refer to temporality on the scale of the day and relate to the rhythms of DAY (DAG (45th/203rd)) and NIGHT (NATTEN/NATT (253rd/294th)) as with DUSK (SKYMNINGEN (344th)). A number of terms evoke a sense of positioning in time. For example DURING or BELOW (UNDER (23rd)), SINCE/THEN/LATER (SEDAN (32nd)), BEGAN/BEGINNING (BÖRJADE/BÖRJAN (85th/311th)), LAST (SISTA/SIST (136th/178th)), JUST NOW/RECENTLY (NYSS (142nd)), BEFORE (FÖRR (157th)), OFTEN (OFTA (169th)), NEW (NYTT/NYA (182nd/241st)), WHILE/MOMENT (STUND (213th)), SOON/SHORTLY (SNART (255th)) and END (SLUT (266th)). Terms such as BECOME (BLEV/BLI/BLIVIT/BLIR (26th/48th/78th/93rd)), SINCE/THEN/LATER (SEDAN (32nd)), LAST (SISTA/SIST (136th/178th)), ALREADY (REDAN (149th)), BEFORE/UNTIL (INNAN (236th)) and FINALLY/EVENTUALLY (SLUTLIGEN (259th)) create a sense of temporal connection or causation, whilst the terms SUDDENLY (PLÖTSLIGT (104th)), JUST NOW/RECENTLY (NYSS (142nd)), MOMENT/INSTANT (ÖGONBLICK (160th)) and AT ONCE/DIRECTLY/SOON (STRAX (183rd)) create a sense of temporal disruption, swiftness or urgency.

Similar patterns are identifiable in the Strindberg corpus. TIME (TID/TIDEN (113th/191st)) is here again a frequent concept as well as the modern technology for codification and measuring of time: CLOCK/WATCH/O'CLOCK (KLOCKAN (221st)). As in the Söderberg corpus, terms such as BECOME (BLEV/BLI/BLIVIT/BLIR (15th/45th/61st/78th)), OLD (GAMLA/GAMMAL (75th/297th)), LIFE (LIV/LIVET (90th/96th)), YOUNG (UNGA/UNG (224th/372nd)) and LIVE (LEVA (273rd)) evoke time on the scale of life and living, whereas terms such as DAY (DAG/DAGEN/DAGAR (77th/160th/246th)), MORNING (MORGON (263rd)) and NIGHT (NATTEN/NATT (287th/375th)) suggest temporality according to the rhythms of day and night. A number of terms relate to a sense of positioning in time, namely DURING or BELOW (UNDER (14th)), STARTED (BÖRJADE (58th)), NEW (NYA/NYTT (101th/178th)), LAST/FINAL (SISTA (110th)), SOON (SNART (118th)), END (SLUT (165th)), LONGER (LÄNGRE (187th)), BEFORE (INNAN (217th)), WHILE/MOMENT (STUND (236th)) and LATER (SENARE (257th)). In a similar vein, the terms BECOME (BLEV/BLI/BLIVIT/BLIR (15th/45th/61st/78th)), SINCE/THEN/LATER (SEDAN (32nd)), LAST/FINAL (SISTA (110th)), FINALLY/IN THE END (SLUTLIGEN (112th)) and FOLLOWING/CONSEQUENT/SUBSEQUENT (FÖLJANDE (295th)) serve to create a sense of temporal connection and causality, whilst the terms IMMEDIATELY (GENAST (152nd)) and MOMENT/INSTANT (ÖGONBLICK (156th)) evoke a sense of disconnection and immediacy.

The Mann corpus bears many resemblances to the Söderberg and Strindberg corpora. As in Strindberg and Söderberg, TIME (ZEIT (42nd)) is a frequent concept, and, similar to Strindberg, the term CLOCK/WATCH/O'CLOCK (UHR (243rd)) which evokes modern social codifications of times is relatively frequent. Again, terms such as BECOME (WERDEN (27th)), LIFE (LEBEN (38th)), OLD (ALTEN/ALTE (123rd/149th and 33rd stemmed)) and YEARS (JAHRE/JAHREN (192nd/208th and 64th stemmed)) evoke temporality on the scale of life. Whilst the words DAY(S) (TAGE/TAG (124th/174th)),

TODAY (HEUTE (135th)), MORNING/TOMORROW (MORGEN (275th)) and EVENING (ABEND (297th)) relate to temporality according to rhythms of day and night. There are slightly fewer terms that relate to positioning in time compared to the Strindberg and Söderberg corpora, but we can still note LONG (LANGE/LANG (93rd/285th)), TODAY (HEUTE (135th)), END (ENDE (145th)), SLOW/GENTLY (LANGSAM (189th)), HOUR (STUNDE (232nd and 192nd stemmed)) and NEW (NEUE (238th and 101st stemmed)). Many of the most frequent of these terms of temporal positioning evoke longer experiences of temporality, especially LONG (LANGE/LANG (93rd/285th)) and SLOW/GENTLY (LANGSAM (189th)) which contrasts with terms of disconnections and instantaneity such as MOMENT/INSTANT (AUGENBLICK (106th)), SUDDENLY (PLÖTZLICH (121st)) and BRIEF/SHORT/SHORTLY (KURZ (181st and 82nd stemmed)). Compared to Strindberg and Söderberg, there are virtually no terms of temporal connection and causality, expect perhaps for BECOME (WERDEN (27th)).

In the Nietzsche corpus concepts of BECOME (WERDEN (11th and 13th stemmed)) and LIFE (LEBEN/LEBENS (17th/85th and 15th stemmed)) are also frequent. Yet again, however, the Nietzsche corpus diverges slightly from the other corpora. Although still bringing together different temporalities, there is more of a sense of larger arcs of history and TIME (ZEIT (31st)) with terms such as LONG (LANGE (90th and 60th stemmed)), HISTORY (GESCHICHTE (130th)), FUTURE (ZUKUNFT (213th)), GREEKS (GRIECHEN (246th)) and END (ENDE (247th)). A tension between concepts of NEW (NEUE/NEUEN (112th and 150th and 36th stemmed)) and OLD (ALTEN/ALTE (134th/232nd and 43rd stemmed)), HISTORY (GESCHICHTE (130th)) and FUTURE (ZUKUNFT (213th)) can be identified.

This points to how cumulative methods, such as word frequency lists, for identifying recurrent terms can reveal clusters of differentiation and repetition across corpora. Despite generic distinctions the Nietzsche corpus overlaps in significant ways

with the other corpora indicating key areas of discursive and cultural negotiation and exploration. The identification of variations between patterns across corpora that this systemic and comparative method allows (contrasting word frequency lists of different corpora with one another) however also points towards the plurality of configurations around these key areas, and highlights avenues for further analysis and investigation. The semantics of time is here a good example: we can see a recurrence of words related to time and temporality as well as different patterns of negotiation and understanding in relation to emerging modern conceptualisations and technologies of time. Temporality is revealed as an essential tool for structuring a realistic literary text (for example rhythms of days and night, markers of time to structure a text and pace the narrative), yet the overlaps with Nietzsche as well as the recurrent interweaving of different kinds of temporality within texts also point to time and temporality as a site of experimentation and exploration (in similar ways to other significant semantic groupings discussed above such as parts of the body, interiors and exteriors, perception and understanding).

These discussions of word frequencies filtered into significant semantic groupings provide an initial insight into the discursive resources and interrelations at play across these texts. In the following analyses, I will only develop and explore further a few of these semantic strands and their intersections. Parts of the body and semantics of physicality emerge as a strikingly recurrent semantic grouping. These can be related to terms that explore space and spatiality (especially physical movement and positioning in space) as well as more generally the tensions between exteriors and interiors. Exteriors can be understood to be physical spaces (outside spaces, usually urban) as well as physical appearances of the body. Interiors can also be physical interiors (domestic interior spaces, as well as threshold spaces such as windows and



doors) as well as more mental and psychological interior spaces with the frequency of notions of self and inwardness. These notions of inwardness are developed further through the recurrent semantics of human experience and human and social values. Furthermore, the tensions between inwardness and exteriors, interiors and exteriors can be mediated through semantics of perception which constitutes another frequent semantic strand (particularly in relations to terms of perception and seeing, as well as including terms of more internal reflection, sensation, feeling, experiencing and understanding). The tensions between interiority and physicality, interiors and exteriors (that already interrelate and bring together a variety of different semantic strands) can also be understood to intersect with tensions between individuality and collectivity, between notions of self and selfhood and more collective notions of self and roles (such as social, family and gender roles).

Topic models of these corpora can provide further insights into how these particular discursive tensions and interrelations intersect across the corpora. The way in which I cluster together recurrent words from word frequency lists into semantic groupings and the way I have presented them in relation to one another in the discussions above is a similar process to the statistical re-presenting of patterns of distribution and intersection that topic models perform. Topic modelling is a method for grouping together semantically related words. Whilst I use my knowledge, discretion and expertise to group together semantically related words from lists of the most frequent words across the corpora into meaningful clusters, topic modelling suggests groups of semantically related words deduced from statistical patterns of distribution of words across corpora — topic modelling methods assume that words that frequently occur close to one another will be semantically related in some meaningful way. An analysis of topic models can therefore provide a comparative foil to my own deductions

of semantically related clusters. Because topic modelling identifies patterns of co-occurrence across texts it can provide a sense of how these semantically related clusters intersect and interrelate by identifying which words recurrently appear close to one another.

### **III - 1 - B - Topic Modelling**

As with word frequency lists, in developing these analyses I derived a number of different topic models according to a variety of different parameters (namely, varying the number of topics that can be assumed to underpin the texts which provides more or less fine-grain thematic groupings) and from a variety of different combinations of texts (namely, for German and Swedish corpora, and for corpora divided by author — Nietzsche corpus, Strindberg corpus, Söderberg corpus and Mann corpus). However, I will only discuss here a select number of topics chosen from different topics lists derived from the corpus that includes all sources in German (i.e. combines the Nietzsche and Mann corpora) and the corpus that includes all sources in Swedish (i.e. combines the Söderberg and Strindberg corpora). This is because I am interested here in exploring, at least initially, statistical patterns of semantic distribution at broader scales therefore calling for the broadest possible corpora in order to explore significant patterns.

Topic models provide you with a list of topics. Each topic is a list of words that re-represents a particular pattern of semantic frequency and clustering across the corpora, in other words individual topics (lists of words) visualise groups of words that

frequently co-occur across the corpora. These patterns of semantic distribution and interrelation can therefore provide further insights into the patterns of semantic frequency and intersections that I discussed above in relation to word frequency lists, particularly in relation to tensions and interrelations between semantics of collectivity and individuality, interiority and exteriority, physicality and inwardness.

```
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<word weight="0.007707233919083111" count="425">stand</word>
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<word weight="0.004588071015360064" count="253">blickte</word>
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```

Figure 3 Topic 8 for all sources in German

Topic 8<sup>5</sup> in the list of topics for all sources in German (cf. Figure 3 above) suggests how semantics of interiority and exteriority destabilise one another and seep into one another (i.e. re-enter one another) through the intersection of semantics of space, semantics of the body and semantics of perception. Through the intersections of these semantic strands exteriors and visible external surfaces become expressions of interiority, whilst inner worlds or interiorities become populated by exteriorities.

<sup>5</sup> With parameters of 10 for number of topics and 3000 for number of iterations.

External events and spaces such as physical spaces (WINDOW (FENSTER), ROOM (ZIMMER), TOWN (STADT)), movement and posture in space (STOOD (STAND), WENT (GING), HELD (HIELT), CARRIED (TRUG)) and conversations and interactions (SAID (SAGTE), ASKED (FRAGTE)) are filtered through individual perception (SAW (SAH), GLIMPSE/GLANCE/VIEW (BLICK), LOOKED (BLICKTE), SEEMED/SHONE (SCHIEN)). Interiority, on the other hand, is mediated through the physicality and visibility of the body (EYES (AUGEN), (FACE (GESICHT), HEAD (KOPF)). These tensions between interiority and exteriority further relate to negotiations between individuality and collectivity within the context of renegotiations of changing social relations in the shifting social and cultural context of the fin de siècle. The figures and characters that appear here — the social titles and polite terms of address: SIR (HERR/HERRN), MADAM (GNÄDIGE FRAU,) and characters TONIO KRÖGER, HERR SPINNELL, HANS HANSEN, HERR BLÜTHENZWEIG, HERR KLÖTERJAHN. — would suggest this is a particularly relevant topic to the Thomas Mann corpus. This will indeed be discussed further in section III-2-A below in relation to *Tristan* and *Tonio Kröger*, in which processes of re-entry between different characters that occur both within and across texts can be understood as processes of re-entry exploring key cultural and personal issues.

```

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sprach, seele">
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```

Figure 4 Topic 3 for all sources in German

Processes of internal self-reflection that explore and negotiate communal and collective life also appear in Topic 3<sup>6</sup> in the list of topics for all sources in German (cf. Figure 4 above) with terms such as SELF (SELBER), SOUL (SEELE), LIFE (LEBEN), HUMANS/HUMAN (MENSCHEN/MENSCH), ALL (ALLE)). There is also a sense of how symbolic layers are developed and thickened through processes of intersection between semantic fields. In Topic 8, discussed above, we observed the intersections of physicality and exterior spaces with interiority and inner reflection. Here we can observe how paradigmatic aspects of human experience and values (LOVE (LIEBE), TRUTHFUL (WAHRlich), SPIRIT (GEIST)) are anchored in material or physical figures (HEART (HERZ) and ZARATHUSTRA). This process of semantic layering, of cumulation of cultural and intertextual references serves to destabilise and explore tensions between

<sup>6</sup> With parameters of 10 for number of topics and 3000 for number of iterations.

interiority and exteriority, individuality and collectivity, and make visible how notions of self and meaning are developed and explored through processes of repetition and variation, of self-reference and self-differentiation. This will be explored further in section III-2-B in relation to *Der Tod in Venedig*, *I havsbandet* and *Doktor Glas* in particular.

```
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```

Figure 5 Topic 1 for all sources in Swedish

Topic 1<sup>7</sup> in the list of topics for all sources in Swedish (cf. Figure 5 above) relates to a process of interior exploration with terms such as SEARCHES/LOOKS FOR (SÖKER), FINDS (FINNER), BEGINS (BÖRJAR) and SOUL (SJÄL). Furthermore, in this topic we can identify intersections of semantics of interiority with: (a) terms of temporality,

<sup>7</sup> With parameters of 5 for number of topics and 3000 for number of iterations.

particularly times of day and subjective experiences of time — MOMENT/INSTANT (ÖGONBLICK), EVENING (AFTONEN/AFTON), DAY (DAGEN), (b) spaces and places — DOWN (NED), ROOM (RUM), PARIS, GARDEN (TRÄDGÅRD), and (c) figures that are simultaneously mundane and significant, unique as well as typical — SIR/SCHOOLTEACHER/MASTER (MAGISTERN), FRIEND (VÄN), ADMINISTRATOR/CURATOR/SUPERINTENDENT (INTENDENTEN), GYPSY (ZIGENAREN). This again related to how the processes of exploration (of subjective or meaningful exploration) are developed through re-enterings between interiors and exteriors, individuality and collectivity (as discussed above). In section III-2-B and in section III-2-C in particular, I will therefore explore how the very process of meaningful elaboration is exposed and explored in *Doktor Glas*, *Der Tod in Venedig*, and *I havsbandet* and *Tristan* through various strategies of recursion.

This initial surveying of word frequency lists and topic models therefore already gives a sense of recurrent and significant semantic and discursive patterns that pepper the 1870s-1910s corpora, and can stimulate ideas for further in-depth analytical avenues. Topic models give a sense of how these different strands intersect and interrelate in meaningful configurations. The purpose of the discussion of these word frequency lists and topic models is partly to provide a sense of how these computational methods can stimulate a re-engagement with the texts under analysis, opening up new perspectives and reframing innocuous or overlooked aspects. As discussed in Chapter II, whilst these methods do not provide analyses *per se*, they are useful for exploring different ways of seeing our material. The second half of this chapter is devoted to discussing how some of the analytical avenues suggested through the computational deformation and reconfiguring of the texts are unfolded into more in-depth and fine-grain analyses. I will focus mainly on Nietzsche's *Der Fall Wagner*, Söderberg's *Doktor Glas*, Strindberg's *I havsbandet*, and Mann's *Tristan*,

*Tonio Kröger* and *Der Tod in Venedig*. In section III-2-A, I will explore processes of self-reference and self-differentiation, of repetition and variation (i.e. processes of re-entry) in *Der Fall Wagner*, *Tristan* and *Tonio Kröger* and how these relate to exploration of tensions and renegotiations between individuality and collectivity in the shifting social relations of the fin de siècle. In section III-2-B, I will focus on how tensions between interiority and exteriority are re-entered in *Der Tod in Venedig*, *I havbandet* and *Doktor Glas* by foregrounding how self and meaning are substantiated both through repetition and variation — through relying on cumulated cultural repositories of intertextual references and the idiosyncratic and unique arrangement of these references. This leads us to section III-2-C in which I will explore further how the process of elaboration of meaning is made self-consciousness as contingent process of (re)signification by drawing on various recursive strategies in *Tristan*, *Der Tod in Venedig*, *I havsbandet* and *Doktor Glas*.

### **III - 2 - Life of the Self: Detailed Analyses**

#### **III - 2 - A - “Jag är icke heller en”<sup>8</sup> (Neither am I one): Recursive Patterns of Repetition and Variation**

In *Der Fall Wagner*, Nietzsche asks:

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<sup>8</sup> Maria Wahlström, “Jag är icke heller en.” *Den Svenska Dagboksromanen* (Lund: Ellerströms, 2012).



Womit kennzeichnet sich jede literarische *décadence*? Damit, dass das Leben nicht mehr im Ganzen wohnt. Das Wort wird souverain und springt aus dem Satz hinaus, der Satz greift über und verdunkelt den Sinn der Seite, die Seite gewinnt Leben auf Unkosten des Ganzen – das Ganze ist kein Ganzes mehr.<sup>9</sup>

(What is the sign of every *literary decadence*? That life no longer dwells in the whole. The word becomes sovereign and leaps out of the sentence, the sentence reaches out and obscures the meaning of the page, the page gains life at the expense of the whole - the whole is no longer a whole.)<sup>10</sup>

In this characterisation of literary decadent, Nietzsche is reworking a description of decadence as put forward by Paul Bourget.<sup>11</sup> Bourget characterises decadence as when “l’unité du livre se décompose pour laisser la place à l’indépendance de la page, où la page se décompose pour laisser la place à l’indépendance de la phrase, et la phrase pour laisser la place à l’indépendance du mot”<sup>12</sup> (the book’s unity decays to make way for the independence of the page, where the page decays to make way for the independence of the sentence, and the sentence decays to make way for the independence of the word).<sup>13</sup> Nietzsche’s characterisation of literary decadence is therefore to be understood in a framework of re-entry, of repetition and variation as a reworking of Bourget’s own characterisation of literary decadence. Indeed, there are strong overlaps between the two characterisations as well as striking differences — there is an echo of Bourget’s definition in Nietzsche’s, but in the process of (re)signification Bourget’s definition also becomes fundamentally reconfigured.

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<sup>9</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Der Fall Wagner: Ein Musikanten-Problem* (Leipzig: C.G. Naumann Verlag, 1888), pp. 21–22.

<sup>10</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), p. 170 emphasis in original.

<sup>11</sup> Bernheimer, p. 10.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Bourget, *Essais de Psychologie Contemporaine* (Paris: Plon, 1901), p. 20.

<sup>13</sup> Dennis Denisoff, ‘Decadence and Aestheticism’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Gail Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 31–52 (p. 38).

Both Bourget and Nietzsche's characterisations of literary decadence are premised on a sense of fragmentation, on a breaking down into smaller constitutive units. In Bourget's sentence there is a sense of linear and hierarchical decomposition where units fragment into smaller units until the smallest unit. The structure and process of decomposition in Nietzsche's sentence, however, is of different nature. Nietzsche first of all destabilises Bourget's hierarchical ordering: he starts with the smallest unit ("das Wort", the word) and progresses through the fragmenting units in a way that contradicts and destabilises the sense of fragmentation (he progresses from word to sentence to page to whole). Furthermore, whilst Bourget's decomposition takes place through exact repetition of the same procedure (x "decays to make way for" y, y "decays to make way for" z), in Nietzsche the process of decomposition becomes generative in the way that it emerges from a process of self-reference and self-differentiation, of repetition and variation. In the same way as Bourget, the unit of the previous sentence becomes the starting point of the following sentence, but the movement from unit to unit is effected through active and dynamic movement that varies at each step: "Das Wort wird souverain und *springt* aus dem Satz hinaus, der Satz *greift über* und verdunkelt den Sinn der Seite, die Seite *gewinnt Leben* auf Unkosten des Ganzen"<sup>14</sup> ("The word becomes sovereign and *leaps* out of the sentence, the sentence *reaches out* and obscures the meaning of the page, the page *gains life* at the expense of the whole — the whole is no longer a whole").<sup>15</sup> In this sense, Nietzsche's sentence follows a recursive and generative process: the different units of text are personified and active — Nietzsche uses words of movement and action such as "springt" (jumps) and "greift über" (reaches out) — which mediates a sense of

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<sup>14</sup> Nietzsche, *Der Fall Wagner: Ein Musikanten-Problem*, pp. 21–22 emphasis added.

<sup>15</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, p. 170 emphasis added.

dynamism and movement, even vitality as they feed in to one another to produce a sense of active generation in the very process of fragmentation they describe. In this way, “in Nietzsche’s version the whole is, as it were, recomposed (from the word, to the sentence, to the page) in the very process of its presumptive decomposition.”<sup>16</sup>

Nietzsche’s understanding of literary decadence therefore emerges from a process of re-entry, a process of self-reference and self-differentiation with French sources which he uses as creative inspiration and counterpoint to develop his own ideas, to stimulate and formulate a new level of understanding. Furthermore, Nietzsche’s characterisation of literary decadence effects a process of re-entry on itself as it destabilises the sense of decomposition it describes through the contradictory sense of progression in the very process of decomposition it performs by inverting the structure of the sentence, and in the sense of dynamism it generates through the active semantics it deploys.

Another figure of self-differentiation and self-reference Nietzsche relies on in *Der Fall Wagner* is Wagner. Nietzsche’s discussions of Wagner are rooted in the specificities of Nietzsche’s relationship with Wagner, and the acrimonious tone sometimes suggests the consideration of a personal frame to the discussions. However, the use of Wagner in Nietzsche’s critical thinking also goes far beyond the particularities of Wagner as a person, even as an artist. “Wagner” stands for more than Wagner here. It is significant that the most frequent names of protagonists in the Nietzsche corpus include ZARATHUSTRA (51st) and WAGNER (144th) — figures which Nietzsche uses in processes of self-reference and self-differentiation in the elaboration of his philosophy. In *Der Fall Wagner* it is not about Wagner, but it is the case of

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<sup>16</sup> Constable, Potolsky, Matthew, and Denisoff, p. 16.

Wagner. Case is an important term to consider. It evokes medical and legal settings: a case in case law can be a reckoning, a settling of a point of contention that sets a precedent, that expands beyond the particular instance to apply to future similar situations. In the medical setting it can be an in-depth study that is at one and the same time focused on a particular instance, but in order to develop an exemplification. The word case therefore inhabits the tension between individuality and collectivity, suggesting particularity but in relation to and in the context of collectivity. Nietzsche repeatedly invites a perspective through which Wagner the person becomes Wagner the figure of thought as when he asks: “Ist Wagner überhaupt ein Mensch? Ist er nicht eher eine Krankheit?”<sup>17</sup> (“Is Wagner a human being at all? Isn’t he rather a sickness?”).<sup>18</sup>

Nietzsche develops throughout *Der Fall Wagner* the connection between Wagner and disease. This is also to be understood as part of the processes and strategies through which Nietzsche develops his critical thinking. As above with Bourget, Nietzsche recurrently relies on re-entry to stimulate shifts of perspective which generate creative critical and philosophical insights. He proclaims that “Wagner est une névrose.”<sup>19</sup> The use of French and the metaphorical linking of Wagner and disease highlight how Nietzsche is elaborating the personification of otherness in order to perform processes of self-reference and self-differentiation, to perform re-entry. Indeed, Wagner is not simply an illness, he is one of Nietzsche’s *own* illnesses: “Mein grösstes Erlebniss war eine Genesung. Wagner gehört bloss zu meinen Krankheiten”<sup>20</sup> (“My

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<sup>17</sup> Nietzsche, *Der Fall Wagner: Ein Musikanten-Problem*, p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, p. 164.

<sup>19</sup> Nietzsche, *Der Fall Wagner: Ein Musikanten-Problem*, p. 15; Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, p. 166— Kaufmann preserved the French in French in the translation.

<sup>20</sup> Nietzsche, *Der Fall Wagner: Ein Musikanten-Problem* — ‘Vowort’ 3rd page, unnumbered.

greatest experience was a recovery. Wagner is merely one of my sicknesses”).<sup>21</sup> With the emphasis on recovery in this citation, Nietzsche underlines the process of grappling with illness as productive process thus highlighting “the philosophical value of sickness itself, without which health would be unable to achieve self-consciousness.”<sup>22</sup>

The movement from illness to recovery through convalescence translates the process of re-entry on a biological level: in healing, the sick body integrates and overcomes illness, and can become stronger than it was before. This parallels processes of re-entry where a distinction is re-entered into itself in order to move towards a new state of understanding (as discussed in Chapter II-1-B). Nietzsche therefore highlights the necessity of Wagner/illness for the process of reevaluation: “Nicht dass ich gegen diese Krankheit undankbar sein möchte. Wenn ich mit dieser Schrift den Satz aufrecht halte, dass Wagner schädlich ist, so will ich nicht weniger aufrecht halten, wem er trotzdem unentbehrlich ist – dem Philosophen”<sup>23</sup> (“Not that I wish to be ungrateful to this sickness. When in this essay I assert the proposition that Wagner is harmful, I wish no less to assert for whom he is nevertheless indispensable — for the philosopher”).<sup>24</sup> Nietzsche therefore interrelates different discursive resources from different discursive domains by conflating the philosophical and critical processes with medical, biological and nosological semantics. In this way, Nietzsche develops in the figure of Wagner/illness a figure that points towards broader issues than what they directly and substantively refer to, and he uses this symbolic inter-discursive typification to simulate processes re-entry. Nietzsche therefore re-enters illness into health by configuring illness as a vital process of self-discovery, and re-enters the body in

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<sup>21</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, p. 155.

<sup>22</sup> Călinescu, p. 179.

<sup>23</sup> Nietzsche, *Der Fall Wagner: Ein Musikanten-Problem*— ‘Vortwort’ 3rd page, unnumbered.

<sup>24</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, pp. 155–56.

relation to the mind by depicting physical processes (both metaphorical and concrete) as processes of intellectual and philosophical reformulation and insight. In this way, “Nietzsche treats decadence as a perennial human condition,”<sup>25</sup> as a constant process of self-questioning and self-revision.

In a similar way to the case of Wagner/illness in *Der Fall Wagner*, Thomas Mann, particularly in his novella *Tristan*, elaborates figures and typification that play out tensions between collectivity and individuality. Mann develops, particularly through the use of stigma and physical markers, a kind of concrete symbolism by putting, in the words of Redon “the logic of the visible at the service of the invisible.”<sup>26</sup> For example, Gabriele Klöterjahn in *Tristan* is consistently identified and described in relation to the little blue vein on her forehead. When we meet her we are told:

über der markant gezeichneten Braue ein kleines, seltsames Äderchen sich blaßblau und kränklich in der Klarheit und Makellosigkeit dieser wie durchsichtigen Stirn verzweigte. Dies blaue Äderchen über dem Auge beherrschte auf eine beunruhigende Art das ganze feine Oval des Gesichts. Es trat sichtbar hervor, sobald die Frau zu sprechen begann, ja sobald sie auch nur lächelte, und es gab alsdann dem Gesichtsausdruck etwas Angestregtes, ja selbst Bedrängtes, was unbestimmte Befürchtungen erweckte.<sup>27</sup>

(a strange, sickly little pale blue vein branched out above one of her well marked eyebrows and across the clear, unblemished, almost translucent surface of her forehead. This little blue vein over one eye rather disturbingly dominated the whole of her delicate oval face. It stood out more strongly as soon as she began to speak, indeed as soon as she even smiled; and when this happened it gave her a strained look, an expression almost of anxiety, which filled the onlooker with obscure foreboding.)<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Potolsky, ‘Introduction’, p. viii.

<sup>26</sup> qtd. in Shearer West, *Fin de Siècle: Art and Society in an Age of Uncertainty* (Woodstock, N.Y.: The Overlook Press, 1994), p. 110.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Mann, *Tristan. Novelle* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2005), p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, trans. by David Luke (London: Vintage Books, 1998), p. 96.

The mention of the little blue vein recurs in descriptions of Gabriele:

- “dem kleinen, seltsamen Äderchen, das sich blaßblau und kränklich in der Klarheit ihrer wie durchsichtigen Stirn verzweigte”<sup>29</sup> (“the strange, sickly little pale blue vein that branched out across the clear, almost translucent surface of her forehead”)<sup>30</sup>
- “indem sie lächelte, trat das zartblaue Äderchen angestrengt und seltsam über ihrer Braue hervor”<sup>31</sup> (“as she smiled the little delicate blue vein stood out strangely and strenuously above her brow”)<sup>32</sup>
- “und wieder beherrschte das blaßblaue Äderchen mit einem bedrängten und kränklichen Ausdruck ihr ganzes liebliches Gesicht”<sup>33</sup> (“and once more the little pale blue vein overshadowed her sweet face with an anxious, sickly expression”)<sup>34</sup>
- “Oberhalb der Braue, in ihrer durchsichtigen Stirn, trat angestrengt und beunruhigend das blaßblaue Äderchen deutlicher und deutlicher hervor”<sup>35</sup> (“The little pale blue vein over one eyebrow, which gave her face a disturbingly strained look, stood out more and more prominently on her translucent forehead”)<sup>36</sup>

These citations demonstrate how in the initial description are laid out all the terms that then leitmotivically recur throughout the text in relation to Gabriele. The recurrence of the vein and its associated terms — such as “beunruhigend” (disturbing), “seltsam” (strange), “kränklich” (sickly), “bedrängt” (anxious) and “angestrengt” (strained) — contribute to semantically constituting Gabriele, as a figure and character. One way in

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<sup>29</sup> Mann, *Tristan. Novelle*, p. 18.

<sup>30</sup> Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 106.

<sup>31</sup> Mann, *Tristan. Novelle*, p. 22.

<sup>32</sup> Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 109.

<sup>33</sup> Mann, *Tristan. Novelle*, p. 22.

<sup>34</sup> Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 110.

<sup>35</sup> Mann, *Tristan. Novelle*, p. 34.

<sup>36</sup> Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 120.

which Gabriele is substantiated as character, therefore, is through these processes of cumulation, of varying repetition. Furthermore, this process of substantiating Gabriele as character draws on the tensions between physicality and inwardness as discussed in the previous section of this chapter (III-1). Physical markers signify beyond physical characterisation towards other aspects of selfhood. The vein is repeatedly personified and described in active terms: it dominates over the face, protrudes, branches out, and at one moment dominates with “*einem bedrängten und kränklichen Ausdruck*”<sup>37</sup> (“an anxious, sickly expression”).<sup>38</sup> Personalisation gives physical and material concreteness to abstract ideas and notions,<sup>39</sup> in this way, aspects of Gabriele’s psychology and personality are performed through the blue vein leitmotifs. Indeed, these markers semantically characterise and constitute Gabriele through cultural resonances: with her elitist background, her elegance, frailty and poise, and the lurking and threatening illness associated with an artistic disposition, Gabriele strands for the nineteenth century trope of the *femme fragile*. The leitmotivic characterisation therefore not only foregrounds how repeated associations generate a sense of particularity and individuality, but also how this process of characterisation is achieved through shared cultural meanings thus destabilising the sense of particularly and individuality through its intersection with collectivity.

Most of the characters in *Tristan* are types. Detlev Spinell is a fellow resident at Einfried sanatorium. He is based on a writer Mann knew in Munich, Arthur Holitscher.<sup>40</sup> Spinell also has a literary counterpart in the protagonist Andrea Sperelli — the main character in Gabriele d’Annunzio’s *Il Piacere* (1889). Spinell is also reminiscent of a

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<sup>37</sup> Mann, *Tristan. Novelle*, p. 22.

<sup>38</sup> Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 110.

<sup>39</sup> Gilman, pp. 7–8.

<sup>40</sup> Schoolfield, p. 270.



“spinel,” a mineral that appears to be a valuable stone but is in fact of little value. Indeed, during the Klöterjahns’ first dinner at Einfried, Dr. Leander, in correcting Gabriele’s misunderstanding of Spinell’s name, suggests that he is not as remarkable than she may have expected: “»Wie heißt der Herr?« fragte sie ... »Spinelli? Ich habe den Namen nicht verstanden.«” (“‘What is his name?’ she asked... ‘Spinelli? I didn’t quite catch it.’”) and he answers “»Spinell ... nicht Spinelli, gnädige Frau. Nein, er ist kein Italiener, sondern bloß aus Lemberg gebürtig, soviel ich weiß ...«”<sup>41</sup> (“‘Spinell — not Spinelli, madam. No, he’s not Italian, merely a native of Lemberg, so far as I know...’”).<sup>42</sup> Spinell personifies the type of the amoral aesthete. He subordinates everything else in life to elated experiences of beauty, but in this overvaluation of the beautiful loses all human warmth, consideration and perspective. This is captured in the assessment by Fräulein von Osterloh, another resident at Einfried, of Spinell’s (one and only) book. She outwardly says that it is “»raffiniert«” (“‘refined’”), when she in fact means “»unmenschlich langweilig«”<sup>43</sup> (“‘unconscionably tedious’”).<sup>44</sup> Just as his name and his book suggest then, Spinell is seemingly sophisticated, but this hides a hard and hollow interior.

Spinell is to be contrasted with Herr Klöterjahn, Gabriele’s husband. He is a successful businessman from the North; he is healthy, vigorous and a *bon vivant* able to enjoy all of life to the full. He even seems able to savour how words sound: his northern German accent give such as sensuous ring to the “k” in “Kaffee” and to how he says “Bottersemmeln” (buttered rolls) that it makes everyone hungry.<sup>45</sup> Spinell and

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<sup>41</sup> Mann, *Tristan. Novelle*, p. 12.

<sup>42</sup> Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 101.

<sup>43</sup> Mann, *Tristan. Novelle*, p. 11 emphasis added.

<sup>44</sup> Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 100.

<sup>45</sup> Mann, *Tristan. Novelle*, p. 7; Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 96.

Klöterjahn are to be understood as a conceptual coupling, as two sides of a process of re-entry, and as complementary and contrasting figures that signify beyond themselves and evoke broader cultural tensions and typifications. Their self-reference and self-differentiation is to be situated within the broader cultural context thus blurring individuality and collectivity as they mediate on a personal and singular level broader issues of social and cultural significance. The conceptual coupling between Gabriele and Klöterjahn suggests the developments and shifts taking place in relation to economic and cultural elites in Germany (particularly the North-German Hanseatic cities) where a growing capitalist and economically powerful bourgeoisie was rivalling the older lineages of *Großbürger* who enjoyed cultural elitism (and had previously enjoyed economic power). The conceptual coupling between Klöterjahn and Spinell suggests how the growing economic power of the bourgeoisie and the developments of market economy are affecting the role and conceptualisation of art and the artist in society at the time. This is also a tension and re-entry that operates on a personal level for Mann. As Luke notes, Mann acknowledged, in relation to Spinell, that he had “elevated him to a type, to a walking symbol, and made him suffer a miserable defeat in his confrontation with the comically healthy brutality of a Hanseatic businessman [...]. It must not be overlooked that *in this character I was castigating myself*.”<sup>46</sup> These conceptual couplings therefore play out cultural and personal tensions which relate to key cultural issues under renegotiations in the shifting cultural landscape of the fin de siècle (as will be discussed further in Chapter IV-2).

The conceptual couplings that play out in *Tristan*, as discussed above, are re-entered into the eponymous character of the novella *Tonio Kröger* thereby effecting

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<sup>46</sup> David Luke, ‘Introduction’, in *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, by Thomas Mann, trans. by David Luke (London: Vintage Books, 1998), pp. vii–lii (p. xxiii) emphasis added by Luke.

a process of repetition and variation across the two novellas which reframes and explores further the conceptual coupling bourgeois/artist. Whilst in *Tristan* bourgeois and artist were configured in separate characters, Tonio Kröger in *Tonio Kröger* intertwines within him aspects of both bourgeois and artist: Tonio is the son of Consul Kröger, a successful Bürger (a businessman — grain merchant — and public official), and Consuelo, a mother who was “so anders [...] als die übrigen Damen der Stadt, weil der Vater sie sich einstmals von ganz unten auf der Landkarte heraufgeholt hatte”<sup>47</sup> (“in every way so unlike the other ladies of the city, his father having in days gone by fetched her up as his bride-to-be from somewhere right at the bottom of the map”).<sup>48</sup> Tonio therefore holds in tension within himself both the artistic, sensuous, cheerfulness of the South (as embodied by his mother) and the puritanical, moral and rigid intellectualism of the North (as embodied by his father). This becomes a dilemma for Tonio as he feels torn between the two worlds, particularly when he becomes a writer, and the issue then becomes reframed as how to be a bourgeois writer; how to balance an appreciation and enjoyment of life, with the detachment and asceticism needed to transfigure it aesthetically: “Ich stehe zwischen zwei Welten, bin in keiner daheim und habe es infolgedessen ein wenig schwer. Ihr Künstler nennt mich einen Bürger, und die Bürger sind versucht, mich zu verhaften...”<sup>49</sup> (“I stand between two worlds, I am at home in neither, and this makes things a little difficult for me. You artists call me a bourgeois, and the bourgeois feel they ought to arrest me...”).<sup>50</sup> The conceptual coupling is therefore not resolved as it is re-entered into Tonio, but reformulated and given more poignancy. *Tonio Kröger* is the unfolding of the struggle within Tonio to find

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<sup>47</sup> Thomas Mann, *Tonio Kröger* (Berlin: S. Fischer Verlag, 1972), p. 7.

<sup>48</sup> Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 140.

<sup>49</sup> Mann, *Tonio Kröger*, p. 80.

<sup>50</sup> Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 194.

a resolution to the splitting polarisation he feels, the playing out of the re-entry of the conceptual coupling he embodies between bourgeois and artist. Tonio is therefore not only a type in the sense of pointing beyond his literary realisation towards broader issues, but he is also a literary alter-ego of Mann's. Thomas Mann also is of dual heritage — his father a Lübeck senator and successful grain merchant and his mother was Portuguese Creole and a musician.<sup>51</sup>

There are various characters throughout the novella that can be understood as facilitating processes of self-reference and self-differentiation within Tonio thus playing out processes of re-entry in order to explore new perspectives and understandings (in a similar way that Wagner and Bourget function in Nietzsche's writing, as discussed above). For example, Hans Hansen, Tonio's childhood friend whom he loves and envies for his social ease, light-heartedness and the way in which Hans is precisely his opposite in every way: "Er [Tonio] liebte ihn [Hans] zunächst, weil er schön war; dann aber, weil er in allen Stücken als sein eigenes Widerspiel und Gegenteil erschien"<sup>52</sup> ("He [Tonio] loved him [Hans] firstly because he was beautiful; but secondly because he saw him as his own counterpart and opposite in all respects").<sup>53</sup> In particular, however, the conversation Tonio has with his friend and fellow artist Lisaweta Iwanowna<sup>54</sup> can be understood as an exteriorisation of his inner reflections and struggles through self-reference and self-differentiation with Lisaweta. Lisaweta is of Slavic origin, from the East<sup>55</sup> — a balance between North and South, a balance Tonio is trying to develop. This points to how, in *Tonio Kröger*, typification as the physical

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<sup>51</sup> Luke, p. xxi.

<sup>52</sup> Mann, *Tonio Kröger*, p. 8.

<sup>53</sup> Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 141.

<sup>54</sup> Mann, *Tonio Kröger*, pp. 27–43; Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, pp. 155–67.

<sup>55</sup> Mann, *Tonio Kröger*, p. 28; Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 156.

rendering of psychological and cultural types (as discussed in relation to Gabriele above) is deployed through another dimension of physicality — through space and place. The image of the winter sun with which the story opens, foreshadows and reduces *in nuce* the dilemma at the core of the narrative: “Die Wintersonne stand nur als armer Schein, milchig und matt hinter Wolkenschichten”<sup>56</sup> (“The winter sun was no more than a feeble gleam, milky and wan behind layers of cloud”).<sup>57</sup> This opening image is the first variation in the leitmotivistic playing out of the tension between North and South that underpins the narrative — a winter sun holds in tension connotations of both North and South as warmth and vitality of the southern sun is dampened by the veiling clouds of the North. Spaces and places mediate and are mediated through a cultural semantics entangled in layers of cultural perception and connotation.<sup>58</sup>

Tonio’s playing out of the process of re-entry is further exteriorised through a physical quest, a journey, ostensibly to Denmark, but on the way, he revisits his childhood home town. The structure of the text follows a mirroring structure<sup>59</sup> — a recursive structure of repetition and variation. In the third chapter Tonio moves away from his childhood town and travels down to Munich, and in the sixth chapter he returns to his home town. Framing these two turning points there are two introductory chapters, two resolution chapters and two chapters in between in which the tensions Tonio is struggling with are brought to a head, in particular in his conversation with Lisaweta.

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<sup>56</sup> Mann, *Tonio Kröger*, p. 3.

<sup>57</sup> Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 137.

<sup>58</sup> For an example of how much place and the connotations attached to it can mean, it is interesting to consider that Max Nordau (Nordau literally translates as “north meadow”) is in fact a pseudonym, and Nordau’s real name is Südfeld (“south field”) (Schoolfield. *Baedeker*, p. 268)

<sup>59</sup> A similar mirroring structure underpins *Doktor Glas*: “The overall plan gives evidence of careful composition: the diary begins on 12 June, at a season which could be interpreted as a time of awakening to life, and ends on 7 October, when the approach of winter offers a symbolic parallel to Dr Glas’s mood and the state of his life. A central crisis – the argument between himself and his *alter ego* – takes place in 7 August, which is almost the half-way point in time.” (Geddes, *Hj. Söderberg: Doktor Glas*, p. 19)

This mirroring structure therefore evokes a sense of recursion with a return to childhood places, a retracing of steps, in order to try and develop a new perspective and understanding. The structure of repetition and variation is particularly noticeable in the echoed dance scene. In the second chapter, the adolescent Tonio gazes yearningly at Ingeborg Holm, a conceptual equivalent to Hans Hansen during a dance lesson.<sup>60</sup> In the eighth chapter, when Tonio is at his hotel in Denmark, he watches doppelgängers of Hans and Ingeborg dancing at a ball — “Tonio Kröger sah sie an, die beiden, um die er vorzeiten Liebe gelitten hatte, — Hans und Ingeborg”<sup>61</sup> (“Tonio Kröger looked at them both, those two for whom long ago he had suffered love: Hans and Ingeborg”).<sup>62</sup> These two characters are only Ingeborg Holm and Hans Hansen through Tonio’s vision of them, but initially they truly *are* Ingeborg and Hans — when he first sees them in the dining room, they are Hans and Ingeborg, even wearing similar clothes to those he remembers them wearing.<sup>63</sup> This highlights how exterior realities are destabilised by only existing through and being brought to us through the interior filtering and perception of the character. This is compounded by the detail that Tonio is watching them from the darkness outside through a glass veranda door<sup>64</sup> — this threshold physical space highlights how we are seeing through Tonio’s interiority, Tonio’s interior space. Furthermore, glass is a transparent as well as reflective surface which suggests how these *doppelgänger*s are exteriorisations of Tonio’s psychology and inner struggle and tensions, they exist as exteriorised aspects of Tonio’s interior struggle.

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<sup>60</sup> Mann, *Tonio Kröger*, pp. 15–19; Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, pp. 146–49.

<sup>61</sup> Mann, *Tonio Kröger*, p. 73.

<sup>62</sup> Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 189.

<sup>63</sup> Mann, *Tonio Kröger*, pp. 68–69; Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, pp. 185–86.

<sup>64</sup> Mann, *Tonio Kröger*, p. 71; Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 187.

Tonio watches Hans and Ingeborg dance in the light as he “weiter ins Dunkel [zurück weicht]”<sup>65</sup> (“sh[rinks] further back into the shadows”)<sup>66</sup> which signals how Tonio is still struggling, hiding in the shadows, unable to reconcile the darkness and the light. The conceptual coupling between shadow and light is re-entered at the end of the narrative when shadows become benevolent shapes, useful counterpoints for Tonio to use as creative stimulus for his writing:

Während ich schreibe, rauscht das Meer zu mir herauf, und ich schließe die Augen. Ich schaue in eine ungeborene und schemenhafte Welt hinein, die geordnet und gebildet sein will, ich sehe in ein Gewimmel von Schatten menschlicher Gestalten, die mir winken, daß ich sie banne und erlöse: tragische und lächerliche und solche, die beides zugleich sind, — und diesen bin ich sehr zugetan.<sup>67</sup>

(As I write this, I can hear below me the roar of the sea, and I close my eyes. I gaze into an unborn unembodied world that demands to be ordered and shaped, I see before me a host of shadowy human figures whose gestures implore me to cast upon them the spell that shall be their deliverance: tragic and comic figures, and some who are both at one — and to these I am strongly drawn.)<sup>68</sup>

This signals how Tonio at the end of the narrative manages to find a temporary articulation to the tensions he has struggled with, a temporary resolution to the process of re-entry between bourgeois and artist. Earlier in the story, Tonio discovers that his childhood home has become a public library,<sup>69</sup> and, when a policeman suspects Tonio of being a fraudster, Tonio’s name on the manuscript for his book serves as legitimate identification to innocent him.<sup>70</sup> These incidents pave the way towards how bourgeois

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<sup>65</sup> Mann, *Tonio Kröger*, p. 73.

<sup>66</sup> Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 189.

<sup>67</sup> Mann, *Tonio Kröger*, p. 81.

<sup>68</sup> Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 194.

<sup>69</sup> Mann, *Tonio Kröger*, p. 51; Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 173.

<sup>70</sup> Mann, *Tonio Kröger*, pp. 54–57; Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, pp. 175–77.

and artist, life and art, can coexist and complement one another — being a writer is a legitimate profession, and literature can serve an important function as public institution. Yet this resolution is only really fully realised for Tonio when he sets it down in writing in the letter to Lisaweta quoted above.<sup>71</sup> This is a final recursive motif — it is only in the process of writing itself that Tonio crystallises a new perspective and understanding of writing which overcomes the initial struggles that plagued him. In this narrative, writing itself becomes the process of re-entry, the process of self-revision and self-exploration through which to develop new perspectives and understandings. This is echoed in Mann's attitude to writing as "a serious process of self-discovery and practical self-analysis, of fictional experimentation with actual or potential selves and actual or potential intellectual attitudes."<sup>72</sup>

Just as *Tonio Kröger* can be considered a repetition of and variation on *Tristan* — with the re-entering of the conceptual coupling from *Tristan* into Tonio Kröger — so *Der Tod in Venedig* can also be considered as a recursive iteration of *Tonio Kröger*. The conceptual coupling of Bürger/Künstler (bourgeois/artist) re-entered in *Tonio Kröger* now becomes, in a new iteration, the tensions between Geist/Leben (intellect/life) in *Der Tod in Venedig*. The question of how artistic creativity and intellect can be experienced so as not to threaten the humanity of the artist, is now reconfigured as an exploration of how intellect threatens creativity itself.<sup>73</sup> Parallel inverse trajectories underpin each novella — in *Tonio Kröger* the protagonist goes from South to North; in *Der Tod in Venedig* he goes from North to South. Both end with an epiphanic climax by the sea. This therefore suggests that the logic of repetition and

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<sup>71</sup> Mann, *Tonio Kröger*, pp. 79–81; Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, pp. 193–94.

<sup>72</sup> Luke, pp. viii–ix.

<sup>73</sup> Luke, p. xxxiii.



variation functions not only on the level of individual text (as discussed in relation to *Tonio Kröger* above), but also on a systemic level across texts. Texts are invited to be seen in relation to one another rather than merely as self-enclosed units. A systemic perspective foregrounds the recursive processes of re-entry across texts which highlight a sense of perpetual revision and reformulation as texts echo, revise and reformulate one another. This relates back to issues discussed at the start of this section in relation to Nietzsche's characterisation of decadence as a recursive and generative process of decomposition and reformulation. Processes of fragmentation and recomposition destabilise and feed into one another not only on the intra-textual level, but also on the inter-textual level. For example, *I havsbandet* by Strindberg is the third in a sequel of three books centring on life in the Stockholm archipelago, and whilst the other two — *Hemsöborna* (1887) and *Skärkarlsliv* (1888) — are meant to portray the lighter side of life on the islands, *I havsbandet* was conceived by Strindberg as the shadow counterpart to the other narratives.

As a further example of how texts self-refer and self-differentiate on a systemic level, Geddes highlights in Söderberg's works how Tomas Weber in *Förvillelser* (1895) and Martin Birck in *Martin Bircks Ungdom* (1901) echo one another: "Whereas Tomas Weber has only a superficial awareness of himself and of life's problems, Martin Birck is a thinker. Where Tomas acts without regard for the consequences, Martin thinks to such an extent that he finds it difficult to act."<sup>74</sup> Variations on the themes of determinism, passivity, disillusionment, and the search for a meaningful life are declined across *Förvillelser*, *Martin Bircks Ungdom* and *Doktor Glas* in a process variation and repetition. Martin Birck, in *Martin Bircks Ungdom*, is plagued by his

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<sup>74</sup> Geddes, 'Swedish Fin-de-Siècle: Hjalmar Söderberg (1869-1941)', p. 115.

inability to bring himself to act and find a direction in life, whereas Doctor Glas in *Doktor Glas* does indeed decide to take action, but this too has ambivalent consequences. Martin Birck himself recurs in *Doktor Glas*, he is an old friend of the doctor's (as is the character Markel who also features both in *Martin Bircks Ungdom* and in *Doktor Glas*). In his entry on the August 22nd Doctor Glas tells us: "Det är färdigt; det är gjort. Jag har gjort det"<sup>75</sup> ("It's over. It's done. I've done it").<sup>76</sup> All throughout the novel he has been wondering whether or not to kill Pastor Gregorius, and in that entry he tells us he has finally come to a decision and done it. Crucially, moments before Glas commits to action he does not want to see his indecisive alter ego Martin Birck:

När jag kom på Gustav Adolfs torg kastade jag en blick in genom Rydbergs fönster i tanke att Markel möjligen kunde sitta där vid sin absint, som han brukar ibland, men där satt bara Birck med ett glas citron. *Det är en tungus*, honom kände jag ingen lust att äta middag med på tu man hand...<sup>77</sup>

(Entering Gustaf Adolf's Square I threw a glance into the window of Rydberg's, just in case Markel happened to be sitting there over his absinthe, as he sometimes does. But only Birck sat there in front of a glass of lemonade. *A bore*; I didn't feel the least inclination to have dinner with him tête à tête.)<sup>78</sup>

Glas explicitly emphasises that he does not want to see Martin Birck because he is languid and gloomy (the translation "bore" does not quite capture the range of connotations of the idiomatic expression "det är en tungus"), highlighting the undesirability of this quality in the derogatory expression "Det är en tungus" that is given particular weight in its isolation at the start of the sentence. Yet, Glas's

<sup>75</sup> Hjalmar Söderberg, *Doktor Glas* (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 2011), p. 120.

<sup>76</sup> Hjalmar Söderberg, *Doctor Glas. A Novel*, trans. by Paul Britten Austin (New York: Anchor Books, Random House, 2002), p. 118.

<sup>77</sup> Söderberg, *Doktor Glas*, p. 121 emphasis added.

<sup>78</sup> Söderberg, *Doctor Glas. A Novel*, p. 119 emphasis added.

decisiveness and agency is then undercut in the way in which he instantly feels burdened and a crushing guilt in the eyes of imaginary others:

Jag har ingenting att frukta. Varför känner jag då oupphörligt på min dörr? Därför jag har en känsla av att *det oerhörda atmosfäriska trycket av andras meningar*, de levandes, de dödas och de ännu oföddas, ligger samlat därute och hotar att spränga dörren och krossa mig, pulvrsera mig... Därför känner jag på låset.<sup>79</sup>

(I've nothing to fear. Why, then, do I keep on feeling my door? Because I sense *the enormous atmospheric pressure of others' opinions*; the living, the dead, and the still unborn, gathering out there, threatening to blow down the door and crush me, pulverize me.. that's why I try the lock.)<sup>80</sup>

The tensions between agency, decisiveness and lack of control are indeed already suggested in the first line of the entry informing us of the deed — “Det är färdigt; det är gjort. Jag har gjort det”<sup>81</sup> (“It’s over. It’s done. I’ve done it.”)<sup>82</sup> — in which two passive forms precede the active voice. Across these corpora of texts therefore we can trace intra-textual and inter-textual processes of variation and repetition, of self-reference and self-differentiation in which issues and questions are explored, re-entered without ever completely settling into any form of closure, but rather foregrounding the undecidability of these processes of exploration.

The episodic and permutational structure of *Doktor Glas* and *I havsbandet* can also be framed in terms of these recursive processes and aesthetics of repetition and variation. The various diary entries that constitute *Doktor Glas* are an eclectic mosaic of different moments, episodes, anecdotes and reflections, yet these all still cohere

<sup>79</sup> Söderberg, *Doktor Glas*, p. 126 emphasis added.

<sup>80</sup> Söderberg, *Doctor Glas. A Novel*, p. 124 emphasis added.

<sup>81</sup> Söderberg, *Doktor Glas*, p. 120.

<sup>82</sup> Söderberg, *Doctor Glas. A Novel*, p. 118.

around the figure of Glas himself as the author of the diary and around his underlying struggle to come to a decision. A core character and issue are therefore explored through different variations and facets. Patterns of repetition and differentiation are also unfolded in *Doktor Glas* through leitmotivic echoes. The playing out of his struggle with passivity and agency, and of his reflection on how and whether to accomplish a meaningful act that could lead to a meaningful life can be traced through leitmotivic sentences revolving around the motif of life. In his entry on June 23rd Glas repeats twice that: “livet drog mig förbi”<sup>83</sup> (“life passed me by”).<sup>84</sup> The passive voice reflects Glas’s sense of passivity and determinist outlook at the start of the narrative. In his entries on July 17th and on September 7th (thus appearing both before and after the murder on August 22nd), however, Glas repeats twice in each entry a more defiant variation of the initial fatalistic theme, this time addressing life in an active voice (although the punctuation subtly suggests variations in the motif — the earlier one more defiant with an exclamation mark, the later one more subdued with a full stop): “Liv, jag förstår dig inte!”<sup>85</sup> (“Life, I don’t understand you!”);<sup>86</sup> “Liv, jag förstår dig inte.”<sup>87</sup> (“Life, I do not understand you.”)<sup>88</sup> However, this leitmotif is given a final variation in the penultimate entry with the sentence “Mig gick livet förbi”<sup>89</sup> (“Life has passed me by”).<sup>90</sup> This might seem to bring the repetition and variation of the leitmotif full circle, back to the initial sentence, however the English translation cannot reflect the Swedish syntax. Swedish syntax is permutational and Söderberg has switched the subject and the

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<sup>83</sup> Söderberg, *Doktor Glas*, pp. 27, 28.

<sup>84</sup> Söderberg, *Doctor Glas. A Novel*, p. 34.

<sup>85</sup> Söderberg, *Doktor Glas*, pp. 71, 72.

<sup>86</sup> Söderberg, *Doctor Glas. A Novel*, pp. 73, 74.

<sup>87</sup> Söderberg, *Doktor Glas*, p. 151.

<sup>88</sup> Söderberg, *Doctor Glas. A Novel*, pp. 146, 147.

<sup>89</sup> Söderberg, *Doktor Glas*, p. 155.

<sup>90</sup> Söderberg, *Doctor Glas. A Novel*, p. 150.

object of the sentence — in this way, even though the passive voice is retained, Glas as object of the sentence appears at the start of the sentence in subject position. This leitmotivic echoing is therefore recursive and not circular — the unfolding of the narrative does not bring about a reversal of or dramatic shift away from the initial variation, but it has nevertheless unfolded a process of re-entry where the initial premise has been modified through a process of exploration of and experimentation with different possibilities.<sup>91</sup>

*I havsbandet* by Strindberg is also structured through a montage of different episodes and scenes, but all underpinned by the underlying sinking of the main character, Axel Borg, further into insanity. This structure is similar to that of *À rebours* by Huysmans. Strindberg had recently read *À rebours* and expressed a great enthusiasm for the book to Ola Hansson (Hansson was the one who had brought *À rebours* to Strindberg's attention) in a letter dated 19th February 1889 — *I havsbandet* came out the following year.<sup>92</sup> This tension between fragmentary episodes that nevertheless cohere around the steady descent into the recesses of the mind of the protagonist also constitutes the structure of *Der Tod in Venedig* which charts

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<sup>91</sup> It can be further noted that this leitmotif also unfolds on a inter-textual level. In *Martin Bircks Ungdom*, Martin thinks to himself: "“Detta är alltså livet” (Söderberg, Hjalmar. *Martin Bircks Ungdom. Berättelse*. Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 1921, p. 90) (“So this is life”) (Söderberg, Hjalmar. *Martin Birck’s Youth. A Novel*. Tom Ellett trans. Norwich, UK: Norvik Press, 2004, p. 76) which is, however, promptly subverted at the very start of the following chapter “Men för Martin var detta icke livet.” (Söderberg, Hjalmar. *Martin Bircks Ungdom. Berättelse*. Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 1921, p. 91) (“But for Martin this was not life.”) (Söderberg, Hjalmar. *Martin Birck’s Youth. A Novel*. Tom Ellett trans. Norwich, UK: Norvik Press, 2004, p. 77) confirmed at the end of the chapter with “Och han sade till sig själv: Nej, jag drömmer. Detta är icke livet.” (Söderberg, Hjalmar. *Martin Bircks Ungdom. Berättelse*. Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 1921, p. 101) (“And he said to himself: ‘No, I am dreaming. This is not life.’”) (Söderberg, Hjalmar. *Martin Birck’s Youth. A Novel*. Tom Ellett trans. Norwich, UK: Norvik Press, 2004, p. 84). Bircks is trying to find a sense of direction in life, he has decided to look for work and has got a job in the civil service, and yet, this also does not suit. His searching and experimenting with different ways of living is reflected in his musings and these echoing sentences.

<sup>92</sup> Schoolfield, pp. 44–45.

Aschenbach's growing obsession with Tadzio bringing to the fore a lifetime of repression. However, in both *I havsbandet* and *Der Tod in Venedig*, the underlying descent is also itself ultimately destabilised through a tension with a logic of recursivity rather than linearity — the ambivalence of the closing scenes transfigures the death of the characters from a final stage of descent and dissolution into a climactic epiphany, as will be discussed in the following section. The authority and stability of the realist plot is both destabilised through the fragmentation into permutational episodes, but also reconstituted through a "principle of composition," a structuring principle of echoes and leitmotifs, or an underpinning drive such as the mind of the main protagonist.<sup>93</sup> These narratives can therefore be understood to destabilise authorities of the plot, whilst also not completely giving up on principles of structure — instead, they are exploring different potential principles of arrangement and combination. Furthermore, the recursive structures of variation and repetition that are developed in the exploration of new principles of arrangement invite a systemic positioning of the text within recursive chains of self-reference and self-differentiation rather than as closed units in themselves.

A similar re-entering between fragmentation and recomposition can be identified in Nietzsche's writing. Aphoristic writing is a characteristic of Nietzsche's style (especially from *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* (1878-1880) onwards). The aphorism "which allows for a loosely organized, shifting whole containing specific ideas but no iron-clad explanation for everything, constitutes the style that best represents [Nietzsche's] philosophy."<sup>94</sup> The aphorism therefore constitutes a structuring aesthetic

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<sup>93</sup> Schmid, p. 59.

<sup>94</sup> Marion Faber, 'Introduction', in *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, by Friedrich Nietzsche, trans. by Marion Faber (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), p. xxvi.

for holding together plurality and coherence. Bernheimer also emphasises the fragmentary style of Nietzsche's writing,<sup>95</sup> and further emphasises the logic of repetition and variation developed by Nietzsche, highlighting in particular how works feed into one another in a process of epistemic exploration and revision:

the logic of continuity is often difficult to discover. The sections are usually made up of paragraphs, but sometimes only of brief epigrams or poems. Sections are collected into larger units, labelled 'parts' or 'essays', and the last book, *Nietzsche contra Wagner*, is composed entirely of selections from his previous writings. *Ecce Homo* contains chapters whose titles are those of Nietzsche's previously published books, of which he gives critique here.<sup>96</sup>

Within Nietzsche's individual texts, therefore, we can find loose and fragmented structures which however revolve around and develop core ideas, but resist fixed resolution and consciously highlight interstices and gaps for the reader to think through and reconstitute. Throughout his oeuvre, Nietzsche is also highlighting the process of rewriting and revising his thought — his first major text, *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (1872), is revised in 1886 to *Die Geburt der Tragödie, Oder: Griechentum und Pessimismus* with an introductory critical essay that foreground self-revision — "Versuch eine Selbstkritik" ("An Attempt at Self-criticism") — whilst also simultaneously emphasising continuities. Texts are revisions or clarifications of previous texts.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Bernheimer, pp. 18–19.

<sup>96</sup> Bernheimer, p. 18.

<sup>97</sup> For example, he draws attention to how *Zur Genealogie der Morale* is meant to be read in complement to and as a continuation of *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* as indicated quite clearly with the notice at the start of *Zur Genealogie der Morale*: "Dem letztveröffentlichten »Jenseits von Gut und Böse« zur Ergänzung und Verdeutlichung beigegeben" (Friedrich Nietzsche. *Werke in drei Bänden*. München 1954, Band 2, S. 762-763, p. 762).

We can therefore recurrently identify in the structuring aesthetics and principles of these texts an unfolding of tensions between repetition and variation on both the intra-textual and inter-textual levels. This mediates a sense of perennial revision, a perennial tension, between stabilisation, coherence and destabilisation both individually and systemically. Previous structures of coherence and stability (the teleology of the plot, the unity of the subject) are destabilised, and whilst new forms of coherence are explored these are not presented as final but rather are also themselves destabilised either within the same text or in the positioning in relation to other texts.

### **III - 2 - B - “Selbst dann bin ich die Welt”<sup>98</sup> (“then I myself am the world”):<sup>99</sup> Patterns of Cumulation and Arrangement**

This section develops further ideas already mentioned in the previous section in relation to the figure of Wagner in Nietzsche and the characterisation and function of key characters in *Tristan* and *Tonio Kröger*, namely, how self and meaning are substantiated through a process of repetition and variation by developing idiosyncratic meaningful arrangements that draw on a broad cultural repository of motifs. In this current section, this aspect of the process of (re)signification — how meaning is developed through cumulation and interrelation — is explored in particular in relation to the tensions between collectivity and individuality, interiority and exteriority, physicality and inwardness, as identified in the discussions of word frequency lists and topic

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<sup>98</sup> Mann, *Tristan. Novelle*, p. 33.

<sup>99</sup> Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, pp. 119–20.



models at the start of this chapter (III-1). A sense of individuality, interiority and coherence is substantiated through the self-conscious layering and interrelating of a web of cultural, intra- and inter-textual echoes. Individuality and interiority therefore emerge as meaningful through self-reference and self-differentiation (re-entry) with a broad repository of cultural references (field of discursivity). And yet exterior realities only become accessible and meaningful to the reader through the particular filtering and perception of the character. The mind of the character is populated through intertextual references, and external realities are only meaningful in relation to the particularity of perception of the character's mind. These tensions are played out through an aesthetic of concrete symbolism or metaphysical mimesis where space and exteriorities become individually and psychologically meaningful, and where the mind is externalised in its substantiation through a web of intra- and inter-textual echoes. The elaboration of meaning is therefore made self-conscious through the visible accumulation of inter- and intra-textual motifs and their reconfiguration and rewriting into particular arrangements (for example in *Tristan*, the process of self-reference and self-differentiation with Wagner's opera foregrounds the process of (re)signification). The interweaving of intra- and inter-textual echoes contributes to compositional principle of repetition and variation, as discussed in the previous section (III-2-A). The recursive logic of composition combined with the foregrounding of processes of cumulation and arrangement further highlights how these texts self-consciously expose and explore processes of (re)signification.

Gray uses the term "metaphysical mimesis" to describe the interplay between realism and symbolism in decadent texts (in relation to Nietzsche in particular). Metaphysical mimesis refers to a "transitional aesthetics that does not yet abandon the requirement of representation, but which moves beyond traditional conceptions of

mimesis by applying representational techniques not to the *physical* world, but instead to the *metaphysical* domain.”<sup>100</sup> Gray’s concept becomes particularly useful for referring to the liminal aesthetics explored in these texts that both subvert and yet maintain mimetic aesthetic principles. The discussion of word frequency lists in the first part of this chapter highlighted a number of semantic clusters that relate to the realistic style and setting of these texts. Frequent semantic clusters of body parts and physicality, movement and positioning, time and temporality, space and place, suggest the realistic anchoring and structuring developed in these texts. And yet, the interrelation of these semantics with semantics of self and inwardness, of perception and of human experience (as explored in discussions of topic models, particularly Topic 8 for all sources in German in III-1) point to the destabilisation and exploration of different modes of realistic and aesthetic signification. Realistic descriptions of setting and space in fact become filtered through interior perception and even become expressions of interiority and aspects of the self. This is effected partly through the elaboration of saturated patterns of echoes and references, both intertextual and within the text itself. Each text therefore becomes a unique arrangement and combination of motifs and echoes that however constantly points outside of itself to the field of discursivity from which it draws and combines its motifs to create its meaning. As discussed in previous section, these texts elaborate a “principle of composition”<sup>101</sup> more akin to musical repetition and variation in order to suggest continuities and associations within the

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<sup>100</sup> Richard T. Gray, ‘Metaphysical Mimesis: Nietzsche’s *Geburt Der Tragödie* and the Aesthetics of Literary Expressionism’, in *A Companion to the Literature of German Expressionism*, ed. by Neil H. Donahue (Rochester, N.Y. and Woodbridge, Suffolk: Camden House, 2005), pp. 39–66 (p. 43) emphasis in original.

<sup>101</sup> Schmid, p. 59.

narrative. This develops a particular self-consciousness in which the process of meaningful elaboration and association is foregrounded.

This is particularly visible in *Der Tod in Venedig* where, in a similar fashion to the characterisation of Gabriele in *Tristan*, spaces and figures are substantiated through leitmotivistic patterns of cumulative association. This serves both to develop a sense of singular characterisation and precision, and to destabilise this singularity by pointing to the cultural sources drawn on to develop the meaningful associations. This foregrounds how meaning is developed through processes of repetition and variation, self-reference and self-differentiation. A recurring figure in *Der Tod in Venedig* is the red-haired stranger. He first appears at the start of the narrative when Aschenbach is waiting for a tram in front of the cemetery. Aschenbach notices “einen Mann [...], dessen nicht ganz gewöhnliche Erscheinung seinen Gedanken eine völlig andere Richtung gab”<sup>102</sup> (“a man, whose slightly unusual appearance gave his thoughts an altogether different turn”),<sup>103</sup> and who seemingly appears out of nowhere at the entrance of the mortuary chapel. This man is described as:

Mäßig hochgewachsen, mager, bartlos und auffallend *stumpfnäsiger*, gehörte der Mann zum *rothaarigen* Typ und besaß dessen milchige und sommersprossige Haut. Offenbar war er durchaus nicht bajuwarischen Schlages: wie denn wenigstens der breit und gerade gerandete *Basthut*, der ihm den Kopf bedeckte, seinem Aussehen ein Gepräge des Fremdländischen und Weitherkommenden verlieh.<sup>104</sup>

(The man was moderately tall, thin, beardless and remarkably *snub-nosed*; he belonged to the *re-haired* type and had its characteristic milky, freckled complexion. He was quite evidently not of Bavarian origin; at all event he wore a *straw hat* with a broad straight brim

<sup>102</sup> Thomas Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig*, ed. by T.J. Reed (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1996), p. 62.

<sup>103</sup> Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 198.

<sup>104</sup> Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig*, p. 63 emphasis added.

which gave him an exotic air, as of someone who had come from distant parts.)<sup>105</sup>

Aschenbach also notes that the stranger is wearing a yellowish outfit and leaning on a walking stick.<sup>106</sup> This stranger is the first in a line of echoing figures and motifs that exhibit similar characteristics to those laid out by this initial figure. In the boat on the way to Venice, Aschenbach notices a group of young men. One of these men in particular catches his attention — he is wearing a yellow outfit, a straw hat, and a red necktie. Aschenbach realises with some fascination and repulsion that this man has disguised his age with makeup and sartorial flourishes.<sup>107</sup> When Aschenbach arrives in Venice, a gondola driver with a brutal appearance, a snub-nose and reddish eyebrows, wearing a yellow scarf around his waist and a formless straw hat drives him to his hotel.<sup>108</sup> Finally, one night at the hotel, a group of street musicians give a performance. The guitarist is particularly notable with his shock of red hair.<sup>109</sup>

These echoing figures play out a constellation of recurring motifs that populate the developing narrative — they have been read as associated with the figure of Dionysus (especially with the walking stick echoing Dionysos's thyrsus, and the guitar also associating with the deity). They are also understood as omens of death — the first stranger appears in front of the mortuary chapel, and the gondola is black like a coffin.<sup>110</sup> Crucially, however, these figures and the array of intertextual echoes that surround them, are concretisations and externalisations of Aschenbach's own mind

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<sup>105</sup> Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 198 emphasis added.

<sup>106</sup> Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig*, p. 63; Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 198.

<sup>107</sup> Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig*, p. 79; Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 211.

<sup>108</sup> Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig*, p. 86; Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 215.

<sup>109</sup> Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig*, p. 136; Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 252.

<sup>110</sup> Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig*, pp. 84–85; Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 214; Schoolfield, p. 284.

and psychological processes. This is comparable to the echoed dance scene in *Tonio Kröger* in which the doppelgängers of Hans Hansen and Ingeborg Holm exist only in Tonio's transfiguration of them as Hans and Ingeborg, and in their function as figures of self-reference and self-differentiation in relation to Tonio. An intense exchange of gazes with the first stranger by the cemetery triggers a change in Aschenbach:

eine seltsame Ausweitung seines Innern ward ihm ganz  
überraschend bewußt, eine Art schweifender Unruhe, ein jugendlich  
durstiges Verlangen in die Ferne, ein Gefühl, so lebhaft, so neu oder  
doch so längst entwöhnt und verlernt, daß er, die Hände auf dem  
Rücken und den Blick am Boden, gefesselt stehen blieb, um die  
Empfindung auf Wesen und Ziel zu prüfen.

Es war Reiselust, nichts weiter;<sup>111</sup>

he now became conscious, to his complete surprise, of an  
extraordinary expansion of his inner self, a kind of roving  
restlessness, a youthful craving for far-off places, a feeling so new or  
at least so long unaccustomed and forgotten that he stood as if  
rooted, with his hands clasped behind his back and his eyes to the  
ground, trying to ascertain the nature and purport of his emotion.

It was simple a desire to travel;<sup>112</sup>

This encounter with the stranger stimulates a process of change within Aschenbach that is developed through spatial metaphors and motifs. He feels an inward expansion, and rationalises this as simply a desire to travel — but, as in *Tonio Kröger*, this outward journey is in fact a journey a self-exploration. After seeing the man on the boat, Aschnebach also feels that something strange and unusual is taking place.<sup>113</sup> Later on in this narrative, Aschenbach similarly cosmetically enhances his appearance after a visit to the hotel barber,<sup>114</sup> and the colour red becomes associated with him too,

<sup>111</sup> Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig*, p. 64.

<sup>112</sup> Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 199.

<sup>113</sup> Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig*, p. 80; Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 211.

<sup>114</sup> Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig*, pp. 149–50; Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, pp. 262–63.

particularly when he drinks red pomegranate juice with soda<sup>115</sup> and eats overripe strawberries.<sup>116</sup> He himself becomes “de[n] Fremde[n]”<sup>117</sup> (“the stranger”).<sup>118</sup> These leitmotivistic figures are therefore outward concretisations of Aschenbach’s state of mind, and stimulate processes of self-reference and self-differentiation within Aschenbach in a movement of self-exploration and self-discovery.

The saturation of intertextual layering within the text, as exemplified in these recurring motifs interweaving a constellation of references, is paralleled in the saturated and swampy atmosphere of Venice. The characterisation of the city is however a result of a filtering through Aschenbach’s perception and imagination thus further turning the exterior city into an exteriorisation of Aschenbach’s interior space and thereby effecting a certain spatialisation of the mind. Already at the start of the narrative there is a foreshadowing of the stifling saturation of Venice, echoing Aschnebach’s stifled inner life, when the Englischer Garten, though only in early spring, “dumpfig wie im August [war]”<sup>119</sup> (“[was] as sultry as in August”).<sup>120</sup> When in Venice, Aschenbach repeatedly references the sultry, heavy atmosphere that plays out his own interior oppression and intoxication which is brought to a head in his final labyrinthine trailing of Tadzio through the streets off Venice.<sup>121</sup> There is a similar spatialisation of the mind at work in *Doktor Glas* where the city becomes a cerebral space in which ostensibly realistic outward descriptions are expressions of the protagonists’ perception and mediation of their interior states. It is a “mimesis not of the phenomenal world, but of the sub- (or trans-)

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<sup>115</sup> Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig*, p. 135; Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 251.

<sup>116</sup> Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig*, p. 152; Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 264.

<sup>117</sup> Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig*, p. 127.

<sup>118</sup> Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 245.

<sup>119</sup> Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig*, p. 61.

<sup>120</sup> Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 197.

<sup>121</sup> Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig*, pp. 151–54; Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, pp. 263–65.

phenomenal, metaphysical sphere.”<sup>122</sup> In similar fashion to how the opening image of the winter sun in Tonio compresses *in nuce* the core of the novella, and how the initial sultry atmosphere of the Englischer Garten recurs to mediate the inner and outer ferment that play out across *Der Tod in Venedig*, in *Doktor Glas*, the opening entry of the diary already foreshadows the unfolding of the story through descriptions of exteriorities. In his first entry on June 12th, Doctor Glas declares: “Jag har aldrig sett en sådan sommar. Rötmånadshetta sedan mitten av maj. Hela dagen står ett tjockt töcken av damm alldeles stilla över gatorna och torgen”<sup>123</sup> (“I’ve never known such a summer. A sultry heat-wave since mid-May. All day a thick cloud of dust hangs unmoving over streets and market-places”).<sup>124</sup> The oppressive and unusual atmosphere is a motif that recurs throughout the narrative to concretise and explore Glas’s internal dilemmas. In this initial entry, Glas is enjoying a peaceful walk that is disturbed by the sudden appearance of Pastor Gregorius. Already in these opening paragraphs he reflects: “Men jag tror, att om jag kunde döda den där prästen genom att trycka på en knapp i väggen så skulle jag göra det”<sup>125</sup> (“But if, by pressing a button in the wall, I could kill the clergy man, I do believe I should do it.”).<sup>126</sup> At this thought, the peaceful dusk atmosphere takes a sudden change: “Då gick jag hem i den onaturliga, bleka nattskymningen, tycktes mig hettan åter lika tryckande som mitt på dagen, liksom mättad men ångest, de röda stoftskyarna, som lågo lagrade bortom fabriksskorstenarna på Kungsholm, hade mörknat och liknade sovande olyckor”<sup>127</sup> (“As I went on homewards through the pale unnatural twilight the heat seemed as

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<sup>122</sup> Gray, p. 42.

<sup>123</sup> Söderberg, *Doktor Glas*, p. 5.

<sup>124</sup> Söderberg, *Doctor Glas. A Novel*, p. 13.

<sup>125</sup> Söderberg, *Doktor Glas*, p. 7.

<sup>126</sup> Söderberg, *Doctor Glas. A Novel*, p. 15.

<sup>127</sup> Söderberg, *Doktor Glas*, pp. 7–8.

oppressive as at high noon; and the red dust-clouds which lay in strata beyond Kungsholmen's factory chimneys, turning to darkness, resembled slumbering disasters").<sup>128</sup> In these passages, descriptions of the weather and of exterior environments become expressions of interior emotional and psychological states: "external circumstances are not important in themselves, but act as a projection of [Glas's] own inner state."<sup>129</sup> The oppressive atmosphere echoes the stifling atmosphere developed in *Der Tod in Venedig* and constitutes a further suggestion of how exterior spaces may in fact function as transfiguring mirrors of oppressed and repressed interior space.

In *I havsbandet* the recurring motif of Samson and Delilah also foreshadows the main unfolding of the story (the betrayal of a man by a woman he loves that leads to his demise). Echoing throughout the text, the motif constitutes a further example of the process of meaningful elaboration through variation and repetition, cumulation and arrangement. *I havsbandet* centres around the character of Axel Borg. Axel Borg is a dandy; as previously mentioned he is a literary echo of des Esseintes from *À rebours*, and his physical appearance is modelled on a young Herman Bang, particularly with his thin moustache and fringe<sup>130</sup> which draw the attention of the helmsman as he rows him over to the island: "Det som mest och outtröttligt syntes fånga rorsmannens uppmärksamhet var armband, mustascherna och luggen"<sup>131</sup> ("But what seemed to fascinate the man at the helm more than anything else was the bangle, the moustache and the fringe").<sup>132</sup> Axel Borg is also the name Strindberg gives his literary alter ego in

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<sup>128</sup> Söderberg, *Doctor Glas. A Novel*, p. 15.

<sup>129</sup> Geddes, *Hj. Söderberg: Doktor Glas*, p. 22.

<sup>130</sup> Schoolfield, p. 46.

<sup>131</sup> August Strindberg, *I Havsbandet. Samlade Skrifter Av August Strindberg. Tjugofjärde Delen*. (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 1914), p. 6.

<sup>132</sup> August Strindberg, *By the Open Sea*, trans. by Ellie Schleussner (New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1913), p. 9.



*Le Plaidoyer d'un fou* (*The Confessions of a Fool*, 1887), a text in which Strindberg reckons with his disastrous marriage to Siri von Essen.<sup>133</sup> Furthermore, the woman who drives Axel to his demise in *I havsbandet* is Maria (also the name given to the literary alter ego of Siri von Essen in *Le Plaidoyer d'un fou*). *I havsbandet* can therefore be understood, in the context of Strindberg's oeuvre, as a repetition and variation of the recurring theme of fraught relations between women and men. Axel's distrust and resentment towards women is concretised in the leitmotif of stories of betrayal of men by women. The first iteration of this motif appears as soon as Borg sets foot on the island. He is recovering in fisherman Vestman's cottage when he notices how Vestman's brother, the inspector, and Vestman's wife, Mari (a variation on "Maria"), seem particularly intimate, and Borg is in no doubt that they are having an affair.<sup>134</sup> This motif is also played out in the echoing of the Samson and Delilah story, an initial iteration of which occurs when Maria and her mother first arrive on the island, and Borg accompanies them to fisherman Öman's cottage where they will be living. In the cottage:

på väggarna hängde kolorerade litografier ur Gamla testamentet, varibland ett par över sängen syntes tillkomna i mindre vacker avsikt, då den ena föreställde Samson och Delila i en mycket ohöjld skildring, den andra Josef och Potifars hustru.<sup>135</sup>

(The walls were covered with lithographs representing scenes from the Old Testament; two of these, which were hanging over the bed, owed their existence to a not very lofty sentiment; one of them portrayed Samson and Delilah in a very compromising attitude, and the other represented Joseph and Potiphar's wife.)<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Schoolfield, p. 47.

<sup>134</sup> Strindberg, *I Havsbandet*, pp. 16–17; Strindberg, *By the Open Sea*, p. 24.

<sup>135</sup> Strindberg, *I Havsbandet*, p. 87.

<sup>136</sup> Strindberg, *By the Open Sea*, pp. 119–20.

The Samson and Delilah motif is echoes further when, after showing emotional vulnerability to Maria for the first time, and acknowledging his desire for a relationship, Borg says: “- Jag lägger mitt huvud i dina knän, fortfor han, men klipp icke mitt hår, medan jag sover vid din barm; låt mig lyfta dig, men drag icke ner mig;”<sup>137</sup> (“I lay my head in your lap,’ he continued, ‘don’t cut off my hair while I sleep in your arms! Let me lift you up to me, don’t drag me down!’”).<sup>138</sup> Shortly after their declaration of love to one another, however, they spot the inspector Vestman with his brother’s wife.<sup>139</sup> The final variation of the motif of women bringing about the downfall of men appears in the closing scene. After a particularly acute breakdown, Axel awakens and “gick fram till spegeln. När han såg sitt ansikte, som liknade en vildes, tycktes det ljusna i hans förstånd, och hans vilja spändes till en sista ansträngning”<sup>140</sup> (“looked into the glass [a more accurate translation would be mirror]. When he saw his face looking like the face of a savage, a light seemed to dawn on him, and he pulled himself together for a last effort”).<sup>141</sup> The looking in the mirror is a classic trope of self-reference and self-differentiation, and the surprise at his own reflection sparks in Axel a final movement of self-determination — similarly to Aschenbach, Borg is spurred on by his sudden inspiration to journey out to the sea . He steals a boat and rows out towards a particularly bright star:

Nu ljusnade det i hans minne - det var stjärnan Beta i Herkules.  
Herkules, Hellas’ sedliga ideal, styrkans och klokhets gud, som  
dödade den lerneiska hydran med hundra huvuden, som  
rensade Augias’ stall, fångade Diomedes’ mänskoätande stutar, rev  
gördeln av amazondrottningen, tog Cerberus upp ur helvetet för att

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<sup>137</sup> Strindberg, *I Havsbandet*, p. 147.

<sup>138</sup> Strindberg, *By the Open Sea*, p. 198.

<sup>139</sup> Strindberg, *I Havsbandet*, p. 148; Strindberg, *By the Open Sea*, p. 200.

<sup>140</sup> Strindberg, *I Havsbandet*, p. 242.

<sup>141</sup> Strindberg, *By the Open Sea*, pp. 321–22.

slutligen falla för en kvinnas dumhet, som förgiftade honom av idel kärlek, sedan han i vanvett tjänat nymfen Omfale i tre år...<sup>142</sup>

(Suddenly a ray of light illuminated his darkened memory. It was the star Beta in the constellation Hercules!

Hercules, the moral ideal of the Greek, the god of strength and wisdom, who killed the Lernaean hydra with its hundred heads, cleansed the stables of Augias, caught the man-eating mares of Diomedes, robbed the Queen of the Amazons of her belt, and brought Cerberus from the gates of hell, finally to perish through the stupidity of a woman who, from sheer love, poisoned him, after he had served Omphale, the nymph, for three years, insane...)<sup>143</sup>

When he is out at sea, Axel hallucinates a vision of Hercules inspired by the constellations in the sky. The mention of Hercules constitutes a final modulation of the Samson and Delilah theme as Axel deplores the death of the hero Hercules by the betrayal of a woman. Yet this final variation of the motif brings on a moment of rapturous ecstasy, as the text shifts into free indirect discourse, and Axel envisions himself sailing out towards Olympus and meeting Hercules, and “[u]t mot den nya julstjärnan gick färden, ut över havet, allmodren, ur vars sköte livets första gnista tändes, fruktsamhetens, kärlekens outtömliga brunn, livets ursprung och livets fiende”<sup>144</sup> (“[a]way, towards the new Christmas star, across the sea, the All-mother, in whose lap was kindled the first spark of life; the inexhaustible bourne of fertility and love, the origin of life and its foe”).<sup>145</sup>

This symbolically and intertextually saturated climax, this transfiguring of death by the sea as a transcendental experience through the paroxysmic mind of the protagonist strongly echoes Aschenbach’s death in *Der Tod in Venedig* where he

<sup>142</sup> Strindberg, *I Havsbandet*, p. 243.

<sup>143</sup> Strindberg, *By the Open Sea*, p. 323.

<sup>144</sup> Strindberg, *I Havsbandet*, p. 243.

<sup>145</sup> Strindberg, *By the Open Sea*, p. 324.

transfigures Tazio into a vision of Hermes inviting him out towards the sea and its auspicious enormity:

Ihm war aber, als ob der bleiche und liebliche Psychagog dort  
draußen ihm lächle, ihm winke; als ob er, die Hand aus der Hüfte  
lösend, hinausdeute, voranschwebe ins Verheißungsvoll-Ungeheure.  
Und wie so oft machte er sich auf, ihm zu folgen.<sup>146</sup>

But to him it was as if the pale and lovely soul-summoner out there  
were smiling to him, beckoning to him; as if he loosed his hand from  
his hip and pointed outwards, hovering ahead and onwards, into an  
immensity rich with unutterable expectation. And as so often, he set  
out to follow him.<sup>147</sup>

The vision of Tazio/Hermes inviting Aschenbach on yet another journey may be considered a final iteration of the echoing figure of the stranger that Aschenbach first met at the cemetery at the start of the narrative and who spurred Aschenbach on his journey to Venice. Death becomes a liminal moment where the linear logic of the descent into madness or psychological breakdown is destabilised through a tension with recursivity in which these final moments are reconfigured as simply another iteration in a process of repetition and variation. This reconfiguration takes place through a shift into the mind of the protagonist in which descriptions of a landscape and a scene are envisioned through the inner state of mind of the protagonists. In Strindberg, the slippage into free indirect discourse effects a complete shift into Axel's hallucinatory vision.<sup>148</sup> Mann's use of the "als ob" ("as if") construction, however, foregrounds the passage as a subjective vision, as a construction and interpretation of a scene.

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<sup>146</sup> Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig*, p. 157.

<sup>147</sup> Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 267.

<sup>148</sup> Strindberg, *I Havsbandet*, p. 243; Strindberg, *By the Open Sea*, pp. 323–24.

In this section I therefore explored how realist descriptions of exterior events, landscapes and figures become mediations of inner psychological states in an aesthetic of metaphysical mimesis which re-enters physicality and inwardness, interiorities and exteriorities. These echoing figures and motifs can be understood as figures of self-reference and self-differentiation stimulating processes of (self-)exploration and (self-)discovery. This highlights further how the exploration and elaboration of meaning is developed through processes of cumulation and interrelation, of repetition and variation. These processes of meaningful elaboration can become particularly visible and bring about a certain textual self-consciousness. The next section will therefore discuss how recursive strategies of decadent literature highlight the text itself as process of meaningful elaboration and (re)signification.

### **III - 2 - C - “Liv, jag förstår dig inte”<sup>149</sup> (“Life, I do not understand you”):<sup>150</sup>**

#### **Strategies of Recursion that Expose and Explore the Elaboration of Meaning**

The discussion in this section is a continuation of the discussions in the sections above. It analyses decadence as putting into play strategies and resources that explore and expose processes of (re)signification — namely, how meaning is developed through processes of cumulation and interrelation, self-reference and self-differentiation, repetition and variation — but the focus in this section is how this

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<sup>149</sup> Söderberg, *Doktor Glas*, pp. 71, 72, 150, 151.

<sup>150</sup> Söderberg, *Doctor Glas. A Novel*, pp. 73, 74, 146, 147.

visibility of the processes of (re)signification effects a certain textual self-consciousness in which the process of (re)signification itself is exposed and explored as contingent processes of elaboration of meaning. This section therefore explores how texts themselves are specifically foregrounded as textual constructions. Texts can therefore be considered to re-enter themselves and destabilise and explore their own nature as aesthetic constructions.

One strategy of recursion is the self-conscious mixing of styles and genres, particularly the self-conscious embedding of naturalistic and aestheticist moments within the narrative. In the previous section, I discussed how Gray's concept of metaphysical mimesis characterises decadent literature as a liminal transition between symbolic and realist aesthetics. However, literature deploying decadent strategies not only explores different aesthetic modes ranging between the symbolic and the realistic, but rather it also self-consciously highlights aesthetic creation as a process of signification. The re-entry between symbolic and realistic modes, their interweaving and mutual destabilisation constitutes the decadent aesthetic. This searching process is precisely what is meaningful and foregrounded in this aesthetic — there is a refusal to simply subscribe to one aesthetic or another, rather these different styles are presented as options of meaningful creation amongst a range of possibilities.

Processes of self-reference and self-differentiation in self-conscious textual construction can, for example, be configured in the juxtaposition and subversion of realistic and aestheticist styles. For example, in *Tristan*, Spinell's imaginary recreation of Gabriele's afternoon with her friends in her garden constitutes an aestheticist embedding within the text, a story within the story — he reconfigures and stylises the scene in an aestheticist mode which is however consistently undercut by Gabriele's

factual and realist corrections.<sup>151</sup> This tension and destabilisation between the realist and aestheticist modes is particularly evident when Spinell recreates the scene in a letter he writes to Klöterjahn,<sup>152</sup> and emphasises it is as a particular stylisation, configuration and rendition of the event:

»Es ist«, so setzte der Brief sich fort, »das unabweisliche Bedürfnis, das, was ich sehe, was seit Wochen als eine unauslöschliche Vision vor meinen Augen steht, auch Sie sehen zu machen, es Sie mit meinen Augen, in derjenigen sprachlichen Beleuchtung schauen zu lassen, in der es vor meinem inneren Blicke steht.«<sup>153</sup>

(‘I am’, the letter continued, ‘under an inescapable compulsion to make you see what I see, to make you share the inextinguishable vision that has haunted me for weeks, to make you see it with my eyes, illuminated by the language in which I myself would express what I inwardly behold.’)<sup>154</sup>

Spinell’s aestheticist rendition is however comically subverted in the confrontation between him and Klöterjahn in the following chapter in which Klöterjahn realistically retranscribes and retranslates Spinell’s letter<sup>155</sup> — Spinell’s “‘unauslöschliche Vision’” (“‘inextinguishable vision’”), for example, becomes ‘unaussprechlichen Visionen’<sup>156</sup> (p. 43) (“‘indistinguishable visions’”).<sup>157</sup>

In *Der Tod in Venedig*, there is also a juxtaposition of worlds as the narrative of Aschenbach’s descent into obsession is framed by and embedded in references to the bourgeois world of respectability of which he is a part, but in which he does not quite fit. At the start of the narrative, attention is drawn to his reputation and standing with the

<sup>151</sup> Mann, *Tristan. Novelle*, pp. 21–22; Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 109.

<sup>152</sup> Mann, *Tristan. Novelle*, pp. 38–40; Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, pp. 123–25.

<sup>153</sup> Mann, *Tristan. Novelle*, p. 38.

<sup>154</sup> Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 123.

<sup>155</sup> Mann, *Tristan. Novelle*, pp. 42–46; Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, pp. 128–30.

<sup>156</sup> Mann, *Tristan. Novelle*, p. 43.

<sup>157</sup> Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 128.

emphasis on the added title of nobility to his name (the “von”) since his fiftieth birthday.<sup>158</sup> This is echoed in the final sentence where, after Aschenbach’s paroxysmic epiphany and death, we are told: “Und noch desselben Tages empfing eine respektvoll erschütterte Welt die Nachricht von seinem Tode”<sup>159</sup> (“And later that same day the world was respectfully shocked to receive the news of his death.”).<sup>160</sup> The discrepancy between the previous ecstatic prose and the matter-of-fact style of the last sentence creates a subversive and destabilising juxtaposition. This tension between ecstatic expressive style and the realist conclusion re-enters the symbolist and realist modes, unsettling both and leaving undecidability open.

Highlighting particular modes of literary configuration as contingent genres in a range of other possible genres by putting them into tension makes the process of creation itself visible. This destabilises and explores the very meaningfulness of the creative process itself. This could seem to effect a certain hollowing out of aesthetic creation, draining it of its creative mystery and magic. In *I havsbandet* the notions of science, art, creation, knowledge and magic are repeatedly put in tension. Science is associated with magic in the way in which it allows for new ways of seeing.<sup>161</sup> Borg elevates science above art because of how it allows to apprehend and perceive the beauty and wonder of the world in new ways.<sup>162</sup> In these instances, science, and Borg as scientist, are repeatedly associated with magic and miracle.<sup>163</sup> Borg, however, rejects the associations, and throughout the narrative wants to dispel the sense of wonder that scientific understanding brings by exposing how science is merely the

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<sup>158</sup> Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig*, p. 61; Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 197.

<sup>159</sup> Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig*, p. 157.

<sup>160</sup> Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, p. 267.

<sup>161</sup> Strindberg, *I Havsbandet*, p. 36; Strindberg, *By the Open Sea*, p. 49.

<sup>162</sup> Strindberg, *I Havsbandet*, pp. 124–25; Strindberg, *By the Open Sea*, pp. 167–68.

<sup>163</sup> Strindberg, *I Havsbandet*, pp. 36, 116, 153–54; Strindberg, *By the Open Sea*, pp. 49, 157, 207.



understanding and manipulation of particular laws of nature and physics. He therefore suggests a bet to Maria where he will create the illusion of an Italian landscape with pine trees and marble palace on one of the small islands.<sup>164</sup> His aim is to then explain to her, and the islanders, how it was done and thereby dispel the magic of the mirage.<sup>165</sup> Notions of authenticity and artificiality are re-entered by foregrounding the process of creation as construction, by dispelling the magic of creation and highlighting it as process of elaboration which enables the exploration of the ambivalence and limits of such creations without however forsaking the process of creation:

*decadent imitation* underlines all the marks of trickery in order to accentuate the artificiality of the product. To make a 'true fake'! This 'true fake' would be one that always retains the sign of its own artificiality, that announces itself as copy and thereby remains dependent upon the things copied, upon nature, or the real.<sup>166</sup>

Indeed, when Borg creates his illusion, the laws of nature do not quite unfold as he expected, and he had also not considered how his mirage would look from the particular vantage point of the hill of the main island.<sup>167</sup> What was meant to be an Italian landscape with marble looks like “en likvit kolossal måne gå upp över en kyrkogård med svarta cypresser simmande på havsytan”<sup>168</sup> (“a pallid, colossal moon, hanging over a churchyard, with black cypresses, which swam on the surface of the sea”).<sup>169</sup> He tries to explain the mirage, but “[u]nderverket var sålunda förkrossande, och det starka intryck, de två månarna redan framkallat, var för djupt att kunna

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<sup>164</sup> Strindberg, *I Havsbandet*, p. 117; Strindberg, *By the Open Sea*, p. 158.

<sup>165</sup> Strindberg, *I Havsbandet*, p. 129; Strindberg, *By the Open Sea*, p. 173.

<sup>166</sup> Spackman, p. 37 emphasis in original.

<sup>167</sup> Strindberg, *I Havsbandet*, p. 153; Strindberg, *By the Open Sea*, pp. 205–6.

<sup>168</sup> Strindberg, *I Havsbandet*, p. 152.

<sup>169</sup> Strindberg, *By the Open Sea*, p. 205.

utplånas med en förklaring”<sup>170</sup> (“[t]he effect of the miracle had been paralysing, and the strong impression produced by the two moons was not to be effaced by an explanation”).<sup>171</sup> In the end, therefore, his creations escape him, and their mystery and magic are what makes him memorable to the islanders. Despite Borg’s repeated emphasis on the creation as artificial, illusion and copy, it is experienced as real.

This re-entering between authenticity and construction is also explored in *Doktor Glas* in relation to the motif of the moon. In the entry on August 3rd, Glas remembers all the different moons he has experienced — his earliest moon was seen through Viktor Rydberg’s *The Christmas Goblin*. When he was twelve and learnt to play Chopin on the piano, “då blev månen ny för [honom]”<sup>172</sup> (“the moon became new for [him]”) <sup>173</sup> as he sees it and experiences it anew through Chopin’s Twelfth Nocturne. Progressively, he experiences more and more moons, filtered through more and more cultural sources progressively losing the childhood wonder he initially felt.<sup>174</sup> Finally he concludes: “Och vad är månskenet? Solsken i andra hand. Försvagat, förfalskat”<sup>175</sup> (“And what *is* moonshine? Secondhand sunshine. Diluted, counterfeit.”).<sup>176</sup> The experience of the world, the experience of reality, is made meaningful through processes of cultural cumulation and arrangement. Glas experiences the moon through the cultural resources through which it is filtered. The elaboration of meaning “no longer takes natural spectacles as its immediate object, but instead takes these spectacles as

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<sup>170</sup> Strindberg, *I Havsbandet*, p. 153.

<sup>171</sup> Strindberg, *By the Open Sea*, p. 206.

<sup>172</sup> Söderberg, *Doktor Glas*, p. 86.

<sup>173</sup> Söderberg, *Doctor Glas. A Novel*, p. 86.

<sup>174</sup> Söderberg, *Doktor Glas*, pp. 86–88; Söderberg, *Doctor Glas. A Novel*, pp. 86–88.

<sup>175</sup> Söderberg, *Doktor Glas*, p. 88 emphasis in original.

<sup>176</sup> Söderberg, *Doctor Glas. A Novel*, p. 88 emphasis in original.

mediated by their presentation in a pre-existing text.”<sup>177</sup> In these reflections on the moon, therefore, the process of elaboration of meaning, the way in which reality is experienced and made meaningful, takes place through a process of cumulation and interrelation, it “does not depend on referents outside the text, but on a constant intertextual exchange.”<sup>178</sup> As Glas reflects, earlier on: “Alla mina tankar och drömmar om natur äro troligtvis byggda på intryck från dikt och konst”<sup>179</sup> (“All my thoughts and dreams about Nature are most probably based on impressions drawn from poetry and art”).<sup>180</sup> The process of meaningful elaboration therefore becomes self-conscious in the way in which processes of semantic accumulation and interrelation are highlighted. The repeated associations, the arrangement of echoes that cumulate around an idea or an image are what make it meaningful. This echoes the understanding of signification in discursive and computational theories which theorises meaning as the clustering of terms with one another: “the patterns of lexical repetition within texts produce meanings that are not localized in or inherent to those patterns. Meaning is not a function of signification in a topology but organization.”<sup>181</sup> It is therefore patterns of organisation, of arrangement, of cumulation and interrelation, that generate meaning.

The diary form in *Doktor Glas* is a further strategy for exploring and foregrounding the tensions between authenticity and construction. There are constant reminders that this narration of the self is a mediated immediacy. Glas as narrator may not be wholly truthful, and he warns the reader of this in the opening entry:

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<sup>177</sup> Michael Riffaterre, ‘Decadent Paradoxes’, in *Perennial Decay: On the Aesthetics and Politics of Decadence*, ed. by Liz Constable, Dennis Denisoff, and Matthew Potolsky, trans. by Liz Constable and Matthew Potolsky (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 65–81 (p. 72).

<sup>178</sup> Riffaterre, p. 78.

<sup>179</sup> Söderberg, *Doktor Glas*, p. 54.

<sup>180</sup> Söderberg, *Doctor Glas. A Novel*, p. 58.

<sup>181</sup> Piper and Algee-Hewitt, p. 157.

Det som jag skriver ned på dessa blad är icke någon bikt; för vem skulle jag bikta mig? Jag berättar icke allt om mig själv. Jag berättar blott det som behagar mig att berätta; men jag säger ingenting som icke är sant. Jag kan dock icke ljuga bort min själs eländighet, om den är eländig.<sup>182</sup>

(What I set down on these pages isn't a confession. To whom should I confess? Nor do I tell the whole truth about myself, only what it pleases me to relate, but nothing that isn't true. Anyway, I can't exorcise my soul's wretchedness — if it is wretched — by telling lies.)<sup>183</sup>

This relates back to discussions about how the self is shaped and perceived (even in relation to itself) through cultural constructions and associations, and how the foregrounding of intertextual interweavings highlight the texts themselves as cultural constructions. Indeed, Glas foregrounds himself self-consciously as a construction. He tells us, in an extended reflection in the entry on July 5th, how he can only see through cultural associations: “Jag har inga egna ögon”<sup>184</sup> (“I have no eyes of my own”);<sup>185</sup> “Jag ser ingenting, som icke andra redan ha sett och givit form och gestalt”<sup>186</sup> (“I see nothing which others haven't seen already and given form to”).<sup>187</sup> Everything he sees is filtered through cultural echoes and associations, and he wonders what he would see if his perception was not so heavily clouded by associations: “Ack, vad skulle mina egna fattiga ögon se i världen, lämnade åt sig själva, utan alla dessa hundra eller tusen lärare och vänner bland dem som ha diktat och tänkt och sett för oss andra”<sup>188</sup> (“Alas, what would my own poor eyes see of this world, left to themselves without all these

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<sup>182</sup> Söderberg, *Doktor Glas*, p. 8.

<sup>183</sup> Söderberg, *Doctor Glas. A Novel*, p. 16.

<sup>184</sup> Söderberg, *Doktor Glas*, p. 56.

<sup>185</sup> Söderberg, *Doctor Glas. A Novel*, p. 60.

<sup>186</sup> Söderberg, *Doktor Glas*, p. 55.

<sup>187</sup> Söderberg, *Doctor Glas. A Novel*, p. 59.

<sup>188</sup> Söderberg, *Doktor Glas*, pp. 54–55.

hundreds and thousands of teachers and friends among those who have sung and thought and seen on behalf of all the rest of us?”).<sup>189</sup> He envies the undiluted perceptive and sensuous capabilities of his artist friends complaining that “[d]e äro bara ögon och öron och händer”<sup>190</sup> (“[t]hey are just ears and eyes and hands”),<sup>191</sup> as if foregrounding the fact that he is only a paper being. The particular ability of his artist friends, however, is not to be able to see a raw and unfiltered reality, but rather that they can see things in new ways and communicate those new ways of seeing to others: “kanske ser han just nu något som ingen har sett förr och som han inom kort skall tvinga tusen andra att se, och bland dem också mig”<sup>192</sup> (“perhaps at this very moment he sees something no one has seen before and which he will shortly oblige a thousand others to see, myself among them”).<sup>193</sup> As his name indicates, Glas is “glass” a reflecting surface. The diary he writes, as he tells us, is meant for him, as a mirroring process, a process of self-differentiation as he wrestles with the different voices within himself.<sup>194</sup> And yet we are made to wonder whether the diary is meant to mirror him, or is it in fact reflecting us. Since he has no eyes of his own, he can in fact only ever see through the eyes of the reader:

The decadent text here becomes something like a two-way mirror, in which the reader’s effort to see through the glass – an effort seemingly encouraged by the text’s themes and style – is frustrated by the persistence of his or her own reflection.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Söderberg, *Doctor Glas. A Novel*, pp. 58–59.

<sup>190</sup> Söderberg, *Doktor Glas*, p. 55.

<sup>191</sup> Söderberg, *Doctor Glas. A Novel*, p. 59.

<sup>192</sup> Söderberg, *Doktor Glas*, p. 55.

<sup>193</sup> Söderberg, *Doctor Glas. A Novel*, p. 59.

<sup>194</sup> A parallel can be drawn here with *Tonio Kröger*: in that novella, writing was a beneficial process for clarification. The process of writing in *Doktor Glas*, however, seems more ambivalently beneficial.

<sup>195</sup> Constable, Potolsky, Matthew, and Denisoff, pp. 16–17.

Assumptions of transparency are subverted, exposed and destabilised by foregrounding the processes of self-reference and self-differentiation, of cumulation and interrelation at work in the process of elaboration of meaning. This therefore re-enters the text into itself and highlights the diary as a construction where Doctor Glas the character becomes *Doktor Glas* the book. Doctor Glas/*Doktor Glas* is indeed only an assemblage of echoes and illusions. The text highlights itself as text, particularly when, after this discussion in which Glas foregrounds himself as an assemblage of cultural echoes, our attention is then directed to him sitting at his window and writing in the flickering light of a candle, and as he observes his shadow on the wall he wonders whether “jag själv är skuggan som ville bli människa”<sup>196</sup> (“I am the shadow who wished to become a man”).<sup>197</sup>

The motifs of mirroring and reflection, of self-reference and self-differentiation, of darkness and light, related to notions of veiling and unveiling, of self-discovery and self-concealment, of performance and authenticity, are also at play in Tonio Kröger, as previously discussed in relation to the echoed dance scene where Tonio watches the doppelgängers of Hans Hansen and Ingeborg Holm dance in the light as he retreats in the shadows. These tensions between concealment and discovery, between performance and authenticity are also apparent in *Doktor Glas*. In his entry on September 20th, Glas decries the oppressive posing and posturing of bourgeois society. In a sudden outburst he complains: “Och så dessa masker! De gå med mask allesammans. Till på köpet är det deras största förtjänst. Jag skulle inte vilja se dem utan. Ja, inte heller själv visa mig utan! Inte för dem!”<sup>198</sup> (“And then, these masks! They

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<sup>196</sup> Söderberg, *Doktor Glas*, p. 56.

<sup>197</sup> Söderberg, *Doctor Glas. A Novel*, p. 60.

<sup>198</sup> Söderberg, *Doktor Glas*, p. 153.

all wear masks. Worst of all, it is their chief merit. I shouldn't like to see them without. No, nor show myself without! Not to them!").<sup>199</sup> He feels oppressed by this posing and posturing and longs to unburden himself, to reveal himself truly to someone (to Helga in particular).<sup>200</sup> In the following and final entry on October 7th, however, Glas returns to talking about the weather and routine life. He has got new curtains for his office and they are "helt vita"<sup>201</sup> ("pure white").<sup>202</sup> Autumn is well under way, and he senses that snow will be coming soon: "Den skall vara välkommen. Låt den komma. Låt den falla"<sup>203</sup> ("It will be welcome. Let it come. Let it fall")<sup>204</sup> are the final words. Despite the murder he has committed, and the pangs of unease he sometimes lets slip through the cracks, he seems to have returned to a life of bourgeois normalcy (or pretence). The colour white in which the final scene is drenched, and the emphasis on snow, capable of covering up in a blanket of white a dirty world underneath, suggests Glas is ambivalently resigned to keep on wearing his mask. Both in *Der Tod in Venedig* and in *Doktor Glas*, the ambivalent endings serve to create a sense of unease under the surface of bourgeois respectability.

Destabilising tensions between concealment and authenticity are developed not only the level of collectivity (in relation to notions of bourgeois respectability for example), but also in relation to notions of the self, and the construction of the self in narrative. This is particularly mediated through the embedding of dreams within the narrative which facilitates the mise en abyme of selves within selves thereby subverting

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<sup>199</sup> Söderberg, *Doctor Glas. A Novel*, p. 148. Tonio also refers to his face as "Maske" ("mask") (Mann, Thomas. *Tonio Kröger*. Berlin: S. Fischer Verlag, 1972, p. 48), (Mann, Thomas. *Death in Venice and Other Stories*. David Luke trans., London: Vintage, 1998, p. 171)

<sup>200</sup> Söderberg, *Doktor Glas*, p. 154; Söderberg, *Doctor Glas. A Novel*, p. 149.

<sup>201</sup> Söderberg, *Doktor Glas*, p. 156.

<sup>202</sup> Söderberg, *Doctor Glas. A Novel*, p. 150.

<sup>203</sup> Söderberg, *Doktor Glas*, p. 156.

<sup>204</sup> Söderberg, *Doctor Glas. A Novel*, p. 150.

stable, coherent and transparent notions of subjectivity. Dreams can be considered as stories within the story that make visible facets of subjectivity that are not or cannot be revealed in the main course of the narrative. In *Der Tod in Venedig*, for example, it is only in dream that the true nature of Aschenbach's sexual attraction (rather than intellectual or aesthetic interest) is revealed to him (although he only indirectly acknowledges it).<sup>205</sup> Similarly, in *Doktor Glas*, the dreams Glas recounts often challenge the reality Glas is presenting to us in his entries. For example, even though he maintains that he feels no guilt and has made the right decision after the murder, his dreams suggest another story. In his entry on August 25th, Glas recounts how he dreamed that his friends and acquaintances concertedly ignored and avoided him — when he tried to come near, they signalled to one another and turned away when he tried to speak to them. He tried to shake it off and rationalised that they might not recognise him, “[m]en på samma gång förstod jag att jag bedrog mig själv, och att de mycket väl kände igen mig. Då jag vaknade, brast jag i gråt”<sup>206</sup> (“[b]ut at the same time I realised I was deceiving myself, and that they recognised me only too well”).<sup>207</sup> Dreams therefore create a recursive interior space within the narrative where a reality within the reality of the novel can be developed revealing truths to us that cannot be revealed any other way, since they are truths even incisive introspective characters such as Glas cannot even reveal to themselves, at least not directly. In this way, dreams can provide a means for revealing the self, without it necessarily being fully acknowledged in order to preserve a sense of stability and coherence of the imagined self. As Nietzsche warns in *Der Fall Wagner*: “Die Krankheit selbst kann ein Stimulans

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<sup>205</sup> Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig*, pp. 146–49; Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, pp. 259–61.

<sup>206</sup> Söderberg, *Doktor Glas*, p. 137.

<sup>207</sup> Söderberg, *Doctor Glas. A Novel*, p. 134.



des Lebens sein: nur muss man gesund genug für dies Stimulans sein!”<sup>208</sup> (“Sickness itself can be a stimulant to life: only one has to be healthy enough for this stimulant”).<sup>209</sup>

Thus, dreams constitute another means of self-reference and self-differentiation, of othering of the self within the stability of the self. This explores the limits of knowability, the tensions between knowability and concealment as well as the tensions between authenticity and construction.

In this section, I discussed how the very process of meaningful elaboration is exposed and explored in these texts. The embedding and juxtaposition of different aesthetic modes within the text foregrounds literary creation as a contingent process of construction. Notions of art, authenticity and artificiality are further explored by the foregrounding of (aesthetic) creation as intertextual process of cumulation and (re)arrangement. Recursive strategies in the narrative foreground the text itself as construction and creation by pointing to the intertextual processes through which it is created. Through eruptions of stories within stories and selves within selves, the notion of self and text as meaningful construction is foregrounded in order to explore the limits of meaning and knowability. These strategies of textual self-consciousness frustrate clear transparency and definite closure in a way that seeks to “‘revea[l] meaning without committing the error of defining it’.”<sup>210</sup> In this way, these texts self-consciously explore and expose the process of creating meaning and understanding as an open and contingent process in perpetual revision.

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<sup>208</sup> Nietzsche, *Der Fall Wagner: Ein Musikanten-Problem*, p. 14.

<sup>209</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, p. 165.

<sup>210</sup> Arendt qtd. in John McGowan, ‘Ways of Worldmaking: Hannah Arendt and E.L. Doctorow Respond to Modernity’, *College Literature*, 38.1 (2011), 150–75 (p. 158).

## Conclusion

In Chapters I and II, I argued how decadence can be productively conceptualised as opening up discursive resources and strategies for playing out processes of articulation and re-entry, for exploring different possible meaningful configurations, across a number of domains central to modern self-understanding and self-experience. In this current chapter, I explored how this reframing of decadence can be applied in analyses of literary texts related to decadence spanning from the 1870s to the 1910s.

In section one of this chapter (III-1), I discussed word frequency lists and topic models drawn from these 1870s-1910s corpora of texts by Mann, Nietzsche, Söderberg and Strindberg. These analyses provide a sense of the discursive resources (frequent semantic clusterings) that recur across the corpora, and how these interrelate and intersect into different possible discursive configurations. The semantic groupings that emerged as particularly relevant to the analyses in this chapter include tensions between physicality and inwardness, interiorities and exteriorities, collectivity and individuality. Semantics of physicality and terms referring to part of the body are particularly frequent across these corpora. There is, however, also a recurrence of semantics that relate to the self and inwardness, such as semantics of human experience, human and social values, and semantics of perception and expression and understanding. These tensions can be configured as tensions between interiority and exteriority — recurring semantics of space and spatiality, and physical appearance as surface exteriority intersect with self and inwardness as psychological interior space. The tensions between interiority and physicality, interiors and exteriors can also be understood to intersect with tensions between individuality and collectivity.

The analyses of word frequency lists and topic models inform the more in-depth and close-scale analyses discussed in the second part of this chapter (III-2). Tensions between individuality and collectivity are examined in the first section (III-2-A) in the way in which a compositional structuring of repetition and variation is traceable both within and across the texts which allows for a tension between fragmentation and coherence in the exploration of potential modes of arrangements. Moreover, within the texts, these processes of re-entry are played out in self-reference and self-differentiation strategies between figures that hold together tensions between collectivity and individuality. In particular the case of Wagner in Nietzsche's *Der Fall Wagner* and Nietzsche's re-entering of Bourget's definition of decadence into his own elaboration of the understanding of literary decadence point towards how tensions between collectivity and individuality are used in strategies of re-entry in the process of development and revision of critical thought. Similarly, in Mann's *Tristan* and *Tonio Kröger*, particular figures mediate the tensions between collectivity and individuality by embodying key social issues of the shifting fin de siècle social and cultural landscape, and playing out processes of re-entry in the exploration of these issues (in particular the emergence of a new economically powerful class, and the renegotiations of the role and function of art and the artist in society as well as the relationship between art and life more broadly).

In relation to *Tonio Kröger* in particular, I explored how processes of re-entry can also be analysed in terms of an exteriorisation of interior processes of self-exploration — other protagonists in the novella function as embodiments and figures of self-reference and self-differentiation. Physical journeys concretise in space and place the interior journeys of self-exploration developed throughout the narrative. Structures of repetition and variation (in particular mirroring structures) also contribute

to stimulating and developing processes of exploration and reformulation, of meaning and understanding. This is developed further in section III-2-B, in particular through the notion of metaphysical mimesis which highlights the tension and interplay between mimetic and expressive tendencies in the decadent aesthetic — realistic description of space and place come to mediate interior states and dispositions. This relates to tensions between interiority and exteriority, physicality/spatiality and inwardness discussed in the first section of the chapter. Similarly to *Tonio Kröger*, in *Der Tod in Venedig*, echoing figures concretise and exteriorise processes of self-reference and self-differentiation in Aschenbach's journey of self-exploration. Furthermore, in both *Der Tod in Venedig* and *Doktor Glas*, descriptions of space, landscapes and weather become spatialisations of the characters' minds, highlighting a tension between exteriorised description that are nevertheless only accessible to us as filtered through the protagonist's perception. This plays out a further iteration of the tensions between collectivity and individuality where a sense of self and meaning is developed through patterns of cumulation and interrelation drawn from a repository of cultural and intertextual references — the substantiation of self through, and the saturation of the texts with, repeated and reconfigured intertextual references make visible processes of (re)signification through tensions between collectivity and individuality, cumulation and arrangement. This is also detectable in *I havsbandet* by Strindberg, where the repetition and variation of the intertextual motif of Samson and Delilah stories exteriorises and concretises the psychological paranoia of the main protagonist. In both *I havsbandet* and *Der Tod in Venedig*, recursive arrangements of repetition and variation throughout the narrative end in climactic moments of undecidability that hold together a sense of decline and renewal.

These processes of repetition and variation, of self-reference and self-differentiation, of cumulation and (re)arrangement (i.e. processes of re-entry and articulation) not only stimulate and play out the exploration of different possible selves and ways of meaning, but self-consciously expose and explore the very meaningfulness of notions of the self, subjectivity and of art and meaningful artistic creations as processes of construction and (re)signification. This is the focus of the final section (III-2-C). Recursive strategies of textual self-consciousness and self-referentiality foreground texts as contingent textual constructions situated in an array of other possible texts and other possible constructions. The embedding and ironising of aestheticist moments in *Tristan*, for example, highlight stylistic genres as contingent modes of expression amongst others. Thematisations of the process of creation and imitation (such as in *I havsbandet* with Borg's creation of a microcosm of nature within nature) re-enter textual elaborations within themselves to explore the nature and limits of meaningful elaboration. Furthermore, the notion of creation as cumulation and (re)arrangement is made particularly visible in the foregrounding of intertextual processes. In *Doktor Glas* for example, the moon is only made meaningful to Glas through its intertextual refractions, and Glas also self-consciously highlights himself as a particular array and arrangement of intertextual echoes and references. This feeds into self-conscious re-enterings of the notion of self and subjectivity where a coherent, transparent and knowable self is both realised through meaningful practices (such as writing) but also simultaneously destabilised by these very practices that self-consciously point to their contingency as processes of construction. The limits and desirability of the knowability and transparency of the self are explored through recursive strategies, namely by embedding selves within selves that act as stories within stories, which destabilise the coherence and stability of the elaborated self and

story. The destabilisation of meaningful understanding by making visible the very processes of meaningful construction highlights how unmarked sides of understandings (the excluded field of discursivity) are exposed in order to bring to light alternative ways of meaning, thus also exposing how meaning itself can only ever be contingent closure, a temporary possibility amongst other possibilities.

These analyses therefore explore and develop further how decadence can be understood as exposing and exploring the very processes of meaningful construction by opening up discursive and semantic resources and strategies that facilitate and foreground processes of re-entry and articulation (i.e. of cumulation and interrelation, self-reference and self-differentiation, repetition and variation across a number of domains of self-experience and self-understanding). In the following chapter I will explore the discursive patterns that can be identified from word frequency and topic modelling queries on research corpora related to decadence (and associated concepts) between the 1920s and the 2010s. These analyses served as comparative foil in the elaboration of the analyses discussed in the current chapter, and further explore how decadence can be understood in terms of processes of (re)signification.



## **Chapter IV**

# **Gathering the Threads: Decadence as Troubling Process in 1920s-2010s Corpora**

### **Introduction**

In Chapter I, I discussed how decadence is recurrently characterised as fundamentally ambiguous and liminal, and this constitutes a recurring issue and point of contention in research on decadence. The main drive of this thesis is to develop an original theoretical and methodological approach that would productively address and harness the fundamental ambiguity and liminality of decadence. In Chapters I and II, I discussed the approach developed in this project, and argued for understanding decadence as exposing and exploring processes through which meaning is elaborated. More concretely, decadence can be conceptualised as opening up discursive resources and strategies that stimulate and play out process of articulation and re-entry — i.e. processes of cumulation and interrelation, self-differentiation and self-reference, repetition and variation. These theorisations of the process of (re)signification are drawn from systems theory (particularly Luhmann), discourse theory and computational approaches to language and meaning, and conceptualise the process of (re)signification as premised on recursive dynamics of tensions and interrelations. Decadence can be productively reframed according to these theoretical concepts as



making visible the unmarked side of discourses, opening up possibilities in the field of discursivity, playing out sets of tensions and interrelations, in the contingent and renewable exploration of different possible meaningful configurations.

In Chapter III, I explored this approach to decadence in relation to a corpus of texts related to decadence spanning from the 1870s to the 1910s (including texts by Mann, Nietzsche, Söderberg and Strindberg). In this first part of Chapter III, I analysed, by comparing and grouping together recurrently frequent words from word frequency lists of the corpora divided by author, recurring semantic clusters across the corpora. A comparison with topic models highlighted a number of significant discursive clusters and tensions — namely, a number of frequent words relate to the self and individual, whilst another set of frequent terms mediate a sense of collectivity and relate to social roles and positions of the individual. This points towards a recurrent tension between notions of collectivity and individuality. Furthermore, terms of physicality and terms referring to parts of the body as well as semantics of space and physical places intersect with semantics that relate to the self and inwardness — such as terms related to human experience, human and social values — through semantics of perception and expression and understanding. This suggests recurrent tensions and interrelations between notions of interiority and exteriority, inwardness and physicality. From these analyses we can therefore already perceive how discursive tensions and intersections fuel the exploration and playing out of different discursive configurations across these corpora related to decadence. These are further developed in more in-depth and fine-grain analyses of *Der Fall Wagner* by Nietzsche, *Tristan*, *Tonio Kröger* and *Der Tod in Venedig* by Mann, *Doktor Glas* by Söderberg and *I havsbandet* by Strindberg. Tensions between collectivity and individuality are explored in section III-2-A in relation to *Der Fall Wagner*, *Tristan* and *Tonio Kröger*, particularly, in terms of how processes

of self-reference and self-differentiation, repetition and variation, are developed on intra- and inter-textual levels, and how these relate to the exploration of tensions and renegotiations in the shifting social relations of the fin de siècle, and to the mediation of meaning and understanding as perennial process of revision and reformulation.

Section III-2-B explored further how processes of repetition and variation contribute to a dynamics of exploration that is unfolded across these texts, however the focus here was more on how processes of cumulation and interrelation — the self-conscious (re)arrangement of webs of intertextual and cultural references — substantiate meaning and a sense of self. This can be related to the tensions between interiority and exteriority, physicality and inwardness, in *Der Tod in Venedig*, *I havbandet* and *Doktor Glas*. These tensions are re-entered in the way in which interiority is substantiated through webs of intercultural references, and the mind becomes spatialised in the way that exterior landscapes and figures mediate and concretise aspects of the protagonist's mind and psychological state and processes. Finally, section III-2-C analysed how recursive strategies in *Tristan*, *Der Tod in Venedig*, *I havsbandet* and *Doktor Glas* not only stimulate and play out the exploration of different possible selves and ways of meaning, but also self-consciously destabilise the very meaningfulness of notions of subjectivity, art and artistic creation by making visible meaning as contingent construction. Therefore, in Chapter III, I explored how an understanding of decadence as playing out processes of articulation and re-entry brought to light a number of striking discursive patterns and semantic tensions across corpora in the analysis of word frequency lists and topic models, and more in-depth readings analysed how these discursive clusterings and semantic tensions are explored and configured across particular texts.

This present chapter, Chapter IV, is a complement to and continuation of Chapter III. The main focus of Chapter IV is to discuss what perspectives are brought to light when deploying the theoretical and methodological approach to decadence developed in this thesis on a selection of scholarly and research texts on decadence and related terms. The vast majority of texts in the 1870s-1910s corpora are of a different genre to the texts in the corpora analysed in this present chapter: the texts that constitute the current corpora are scholarly analyses of decadence as cultural, literary and linguistic phenomenon, whereas the texts in the 1870s-1910s corpora were mostly literary and philosophical texts performing decadence as resource and strategy. I therefore do not expect to analyse particular recursive strategies and techniques as was the case in the previous chapter. I will, however, explore what discursive patterns and semantic tensions emerge across the corpora and compare these with discursive clusterings and tensions analysed in Chapter III, and how this relates to the understanding of decadence as opening up discursive resources and strategies that stimulate and play out processes of articulation and re-entry.

After a few initial notes and reminders on the corpora and the analytical process (in IV-1), I will first of all discuss, in section IV-2, a number of frequently recurring discursive tensions and interrelations that emerge from the analysis of word frequency lists and topic models of research corpora related to decadence between 1920s-2010s. The research on decadence (as represented in these corpora) can therefore be understood to revolve around and explore these recurrent discursive tensions and interrelations. In other words, decadence is more or latently conceived, in the scholarly literature on decadence that constitutes these corpora, in terms of recurring discursive tensions and interrelations. Furthermore, the particular discursive tensions and interrelations that emerge from these analyses interrelate fundamental domains of

modern self-understanding and self-experience. This therefore points to the productivity of considering decadence in terms of process of (re)signification since it is conceived, as discussed above, as unfolding dynamics of tensions and interrelations across a number of discursive domains. In IV-2-A, I focus in particular on the sense of temporal self-consciousness at the fin de siècle, and shifts in the conceptualisation and experience of time and temporal self-positioning. In IV-2-B, I explore discursive tensions that unfold reformulations of notions of self and subjectivity, collectivity and social life. Finally, in IV-2-C, I discuss the reformulations of the notions and role of art and the artist in the shifting cultural landscape of the fin de siècle. These discussions of the discursive patterns identified in word frequency lists and topic models of the 1920s-2010s corpora will be related to relevant contextual aspects of fin de siècle culture as well as to analyses developed in Chapter III. In the next part of the chapter, IV-3, I compare discursive patterns of cumulation and intersection from the research corpora related to decadence with patterns from the research corpora related to modernity, fin de siècle and degeneration. The overlaps and differences of word frequencies between these different corpora highlight how decadence functions in terms of self-differentiation and self-reference in relation to each of these corpora. Decadence both overlaps in significant ways (self-reference) but also keeps open other discursive possibilities (self-differentiation) thus functioning as the unmarked side of the distinction, or the field of discursivity in relation to each of these corpora. This therefore further highlights the productivity of considering decadence as resource and strategy for playing out processes of articulation and re-entry. The interplay of self-reference and self-differentiation between decadence and modernity emerges as particularly significant and will be discussed at greater length compared to the re-entry of decadence in fin de siècle and degeneration. This therefore allows me to substantiate

further how decadence can be productively framed in terms of discursive strategies and resources that play out the dynamics and possibilities of the process of (re)signification and elaboration of meaning. This systemic and discursive approach to decadence can offer new perspectives on how to articulate literary and linguistic understandings of decadence with broader discussions in the turbulent social and cultural context of the fin de siècle.

#### **IV - 1 - Decadence as Troubling Process in 1920s-2010s Corpora:**

##### **Notes on the Corpora and Analytical Process**

###### **Notes on the corpus and typographical conventions:**

Before moving on to the discussion of the analyses, I will reiterate here a few points already discussed in the Introduction (particularly in section 3) with regards to the corpora used for the analyses discussed in this present chapter. Most of the sources constituting this corpus are academic or scholarly texts (75 books/monographs, 17 edited volumes, 7 chapters from a book, 142 original articles, 39 review articles, 1 special issue, 8 doctoral theses, 3 excerpts of entries from encyclopaedias or dictionaries, 1 annotated bibliography, 1 summary of a book, and 1 call for papers and conference programme) exploring decadence (or a related concept, cf. following paragraph) at the fin de siècle. However, I have also included some sources which approach decadence as a broader, more general term not necessarily considering it in relation to the fin de siècle specifically, or focussing their analyses beyond the fin de siècle.

Furthermore, sources included in this corpus do not all necessarily explicitly and/or exclusively deal with decadence proper. I have included sources that focus on concepts related to decadence, namely: fin de siècle, modernity and degeneration.<sup>1</sup> I classified each one of the sources in this corpus to a theme/label (either decadence, modernity, fin de siècle or degeneration) — this is an interpretative choice and a matter of subjective discretion, but each source has been assigned to the theme which arguably constitutes the predominant concern of the text. A total of 278 sources compose this corpus. 174 of these are specific to the topic of decadence. Of the remaining texts: 48 sources deal with the topic of the fin de siècle, 38 relate more specifically to modernity, 18 sources explore the topic of degeneration.

Throughout the analytical process, in order to explore patterns of variation and repetitions along different analytical lines, I distinguish and divide the corpora according to different characteristics, namely, the “theme/label” of the texts (i.e. whether it relates to Decadence, Modernity, Fin de Siècle or Degeneration) and the cultural contexts (i.e. whether the text focusses on the German or Swedish cultural context or whether it takes a Comparative/General approach). 90 sources in this corpus focus on the German context, whilst 26 sources focus on the Swedish context (there is an emphasis on Sweden, but sources also consider Danish, Norwegian and Finnish cultural context). 97 sources in the corpus adopt a Comparative/European focus. Texts are also always divided according to language in order to be able to generate revealing patterns in computational analyses (computational methods do not work well on multi-lingual corpora). When I am referring to corpora the themes/labels and cultural

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<sup>1</sup> I also developed three smaller corpora relating to the subjects of Aestheticism, Jugendstil/Art Nouveau, Naturalism. Although I do not discuss them in the thesis, they played a role in the process of developing the analytical arc of this thesis.

contexts of the corpus will be capitalised — when Decadence, Modernity, Fin de Siècle and Degeneration are capitalised this is to make clear that I am referring to the corpora as classified to these themes/labels. When referring to various corpora, I will designate the corpora by cultural context, theme/label and language (always in that order). For example, if I am discussing Swedish Decadence in German, then this corpus groups together texts that have been classified as relating to Decadence (as their theme/label) in the Swedish cultural context, and these texts are written in German. Furthermore, words that appear in word frequency lists or topic models will be marked in SMALL CAPS, and it should be noted that only the words that strictly feature in word frequency lists or topic models will be marked in small caps. A full list of the sources (divided by theme/label and cultural context) with full bibliographical details can be found in Appendix 2.

### **The analytical process:**

The focus of this chapter is to highlight and discuss some of the significant and relevant patterns that emerge from running word frequency and topic modelling algorithms on corpora of research texts that relate primarily to decadence but also in comparison to modernity, fin de siècle and degeneration in the German and Swedish cultural contexts published between the 1920s and the 2010s. Whilst Chapter I can be considered a review of key relevant points in research on decadence between 1920s-2010s developed around a particular argument and through close readings, the following section will provide an overview of patterns that emerge from the computational reconfiguration and contrasting of research on decadence (and other related concepts) between the 1920s and the 2010s. This process helps to foreground recurrent areas of focus and discussion that underpin research related to these

concepts. The discussion in this section therefore serves to concretise and detail further the approach to decadence developed throughout this thesis and previously discussed in Chapters I and II. A further aim of this chapter, similarly to Chapter III, is to provide insight into the process of working with computational methods, particularly, how these can facilitate the generation of different perspectives that can open up analytical avenues for further research.

Working with computational methods involves a combination of the researcher's interpretative insights and intuitions with the statistical patterns of cumulation and distribution generated through computational deformance. Just as in Chapter III, I have identified from filtering and comparing word frequency lists across different corpora permutations a number of recurrent discursive and semantic clusters. I surveyed the first few hundred most frequent words as listed in word frequency lists for each of the corpora and identified some initial patterns. I then grouped together frequently recurring semantically related words into overarching discursive clusters derived from the recurrent patterns identified. This involved a process of oscillation and iteration between a number of analytical tasks such as comparing and contrasting between different permutations of corpora, filtering and reworking lists of key words in order to group terms together into meaningful and significant discursive patterns, running text search queries (i.e. to see every occurrence of the word in context) on particular terms in order to explore how a term is used in context so as to decide whether a term is significant or not and how it relates to the analyses. The relevance and significance of most frequently recurring words therefore emerged from an iterative analytical process of comparison between corpora. As discussed in Introduction (particularly in section 4) the systemic and permutational organisational structure enables a comparison along different scales and different characteristics of analysis (for example, I can explore and



compare patterns according to cultural context, or the particular theme to which the texts relate and any permutation of these different characteristics). The corpora used in comparative analyses in this chapter include: German Decadence in English, German Decadence in German, Swedish Decadence in English, Swedish Decadence in Swedish, Comparative/European Decadence in English and Comparative European Decadence in German. These corpora are primarily explored in IV-2. They are then compared, in IV-3, with the Modernity, Fin de Siècle and Degeneration corpora which include: German Modernity in English, German Modernity in German, Swedish Modernity in English, Swedish Modernity in Swedish. Comparative/European Fin de Siècle in English, German Fin de Siècle in English, German Fin de Siècle in German, Swedish Fin de Siècle in English, Swedish Fin de Siècle in French, Swedish Fin de Siècle in Swedish. Comparative/European Degeneration in English, Comparative/European Degeneration in German, German Degeneration in English and German Degeneration in German. Appendixes 11-30 contain lists of the particular sources that are included in each of these corpora.

There is space here only to discuss the patterns that are most relevant to the analytical arc developed in this thesis, but original word frequency lists can be found in Appendixes 31-67 (for each of the different corpora as listed above). Appendix 4 shows the intermediate analytical step between raw word frequency lists and the more stabilised and abstracted discursive domains I ultimately used to structure my analyses of recurring discursive strands and interactions in research on decadence. The recurrent semantic clusters initially identified (as can be found in Appendix 4) were then further refined and abstracted into:

(a) the discursive domain of the self, subjectivity, individuality, self-reflection and self-consciousness;

(b) the discursive domain of time, temporality, historical self-consciousness and historical self-positioning;

(c) words that relate to issues and aspects of society, culture and politics, particularly: terms of collectivity and individuality; gender and sexuality; religion and spirituality; ideas and ideology;

(d) the discursive domain of art and literature;

(e) words that relate to comprehension, understanding, perception and processes of representation, structuring, shaping and organising;

(f) categorical labels or concepts (i.e. decadence, degeneration, fin de siècle, modernity) and key figures (e.g. Nietzsche, Baudelaire).

And in a final analytical iteration of further abstraction and filtering I conceptualise these categories as relating to the fundamental discursive domains of TIME (this includes strand (b) listed above), SELF (this includes strand (a) listed above), WORLD (this includes strand (c) listed above) and ART (this includes strands (d) and (e) listed above). The key discursive domains which then take on different configurations in processes of intersection and interrelation through articulation can be anchored (for analytical clarity) around frequently recurrent notions of SELF, TIME, WORLD (i.e. key social, political, cultural and ideological issues) and ART. Broadly speaking, SELF, TIME, WORLD and ART can be understood as overarching discursive domains and guiding threads along which to conceptualise the discursive tensions and semantic couplings that emerge from the interrelations and intersections of these discursive domains. A comparison between topic models and my analyses of word frequency lists allows me to explore how these discursive domains intersect, and how particular semantic strands of these discursive domains interrelate and interact into different discursive configurations and around particular semantic tensions. This serves to substantiate

significant discursive tensions and intersections as well as explore alternative approaches and perspectives through which these discursive patterns could be conceptualised.

In the following section, I explore significant discursive tensions and interrelations across different permutations of the Decadence corpora. At the intersections of the domains of TIME/SELF/WORLD, we can identify discursive configurations that relate to historical and temporal self-positioning and self-consciousness and to the conceptualisations of the development of the self and the development of historical and cultural trajectories. In the discursive domains of SELF and WORLD there are recurrent patterns that relate to notions of codification of the self and the exploration of notions of subjectivity and collectivity. In the intersecting discursive domains of ART/SELF/WORLD, we can find notions that suggest art as a particular cultural practice for making sense and developing coherence. There are also a number of terms that could relate to the issue of reformulations of the role of art and the artist at this time, and the self-conscious positioning of art as privileged domain for human and cultural exploration, and facilitator of broader debate.

#### **IV - 2 - Decadence as Troubling Process: Analyses of Discursive Patterns and Tensions Across 1920s-2010s Decadence Corpora**

In this part of the chapter I will be exploring recurrent tensions that emerge at the intersections of the discursive domains of TIME, SELF, ART and WORLD across the corpora of German Decadence (which includes German Decadence in English,

German Decadence in German), Swedish Decadence (which includes Swedish Decadence in English, Swedish Decadence in German) and Comparative/European Decadence (which includes Comparative/European Decadence in English; Comparative/European Decadence in German). At the intersections of TIME/SELF/WORLD we can identify a recurrent tension between semantics of decline and renewal that relate to shifts in relation to temporal experience and temporal self-conscious at the fin de siècle. The intersection of SELF/WORLD play out tensions between notions of individuality and collectivity which relate to reformulations of notions of subjectivity and the codification of the self at the turn of the century. Finally, at the intersection of the domains of ART/SELF/WORLD, we can observe tensions that revolve around different conceptualisations of art as particular cultural practice in relation to and as distinct from other cultural practices. This relates to modern reconceptualisations of the role and function of art and the artist.

#### **IV - 2 - A - TIME/SELF/WORLD**

It is widely argued that a shift in the conceptualisations and experiences of time take place at the fin de siècle, and that there emerges an acute sense of temporal self-consciousness at this time.<sup>2</sup> As West argues: “The first quality which distinguishes

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<sup>2</sup> Thomé, pp. 15–22; Hayden White, ‘Foreword’, in *The Practice of Conceptual History. Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, by Reinhart Koselleck, trans. by Todd Samuel Presner (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. ix–xiv (p. x).

the ‘fin de siècle’ phenomenon is an awareness of time and future.”<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, White links the nineteenth century to modernity and the process of

“Verzeitlichung” (temporalisation): modernity becomes self-conscious of its own history, it situates itself within history and conceptualises it in terms of particular phases or stages of development. Modernity historicises itself, it imposes temporal patterns and distinction on the past and present. It is in modernity that “historical time” emerges. This creates horizons of expectation for the future in relation to past and present.<sup>4</sup>

Decadence has often been associated with pessimism and disillusionment. Weber, for example, emphasises the material, technical, scientific and social improvements and development taking place at the time which are in contradiction to the sense of doom and pessimism mediated through decadence.<sup>5</sup> Weber therefore emphasises “the striking discrepancy between the literary version of decadence and the material and political progress with which the affirmations or aspirations of decadence visibly clashed.”<sup>6</sup> In relation to the German and Swedish contexts, however, there has often been an emphasis on the particular optimism that ostensibly differentiates these cultural contexts from the more general prevailing gloom and pessimism across Europe. Callmander points towards particular events (the Stockholm exhibition of 1897 among others) that suggest “a national optimistic faith in the future” in Sweden at the time.<sup>7</sup> Schoolfield, moreover, asks “why (in contrast to France, England, Italy and

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<sup>3</sup> West, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> White, p. ix.

<sup>5</sup> Weber, pp. 13–14.

<sup>6</sup> Weber, p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> Callmander, p. 76.

Denmark, for example), the literary fad of decadence thrived so ill in Germany”<sup>8</sup> and links this to how

[s]peaking very generally, we can point to the strong current of optimism and even of arrogance that ran through German public life in the latter part of the nineteenth century: [...] The new Germany, long since a major cultural and philosophical and musical force, had become a dominant European political power, united in January 1871, under Wilhelm I, king of Prussia, who became emperor of Germany. A decadent frame of mind seemed incompatible with the flourishing Germany of those years.<sup>9</sup>

Rather than conceptualising the shifts in experiences of time and temporal consciousness taking place at the fin de siècle in terms of strict distinction between optimism and pessimism or progress and decline, an analysis of recurrent word frequencies point towards a more complex picture, and suggest, rather, the interplay between optimism and pessimism and progress and decline in the exploration of different aspects of these tensions into an array of different discursive configurations.

Rather than strict distinctions, there emerges across the corpora patterns of tension in relation to temporal self-consciousness and conceptualisations and experiences of temporality. In the Comparative/European Decadence corpus in English, a tension between decline and renewal emerges with frequent terms such as LIFE/LIVING (4th and 76th stemmed), NEW (8th) and YOUNG (109th) paralleled by DEATH (28th), END (44th and 28th stemmed) and OLD (114th). SELF (17th) also appears as a frequent concept, and intersects with the semantics of TIME (9th) with terms that relate to conceptualisations of development of the SELF such as BECOME (100th), EXPERIENCE (98th), YOUNG (109th), OLD (114th), HUMAN (21st), YEARS (68th) and DEATH (28th).

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<sup>8</sup> Schoolfield, p. 267.

<sup>9</sup> Schoolfield, p. 268.

Temporal semantics also are deployed on a more collective level with terms relating to broad arcs of HISTORICAL self-consciousness with NEW (8th), EARLY (111th), MODERN (29th and 15th stemmed), CENTURY (14th), AGE (112th), HISTORY/HISTORICAL (49th/135th) and FIN DE SIÈCLE (FIN (164th) / SIÈCLE (171st)). Similarly, in the Comparative/European Decadence corpus in German tensions between decline and renewal are suggested with the frequent concepts of NEW (NEUEN/NEUE (42nd/48th and 9th stemmed)), LIFE (LEBEN/LEBENS (5th/8th)), YOUNG (JUNGEN (158th/66th stemmed)) which contrast with the frequent concept of END (ENDE (54th)).

In the German Decadence corpus in English we can observe similar patterns of tension. END (86th), OLD (63rd) and DEATH/DIE/DYING (103rd and 66th stemmed) are relatively frequent, but much less frequent than NEW (3rd) and LIFE (3rd). Similarly, PAST (126th) and FUTURE (115th) are both relatively frequent terms with FUTURE slightly more frequent. TIME (8th), HISTORY/HISTORICAL (39th) and historical self-consciousness therefore emerge as a recurrent semantic clustering both on the level of collectivity — with terms such as NEW (3rd), AGE (113th), OLD (63rd), PAST (126th), FUTURE (115th) — and on the level of the self — with terms such as LIFE/ LIVING (3rd/ 149th and 5th stemmed), END (86th), DEATH/DIE/DYING (103rd and 66th stemmed), EXISTENCE (83rd and 41st stemmed), FUTURE (115th), BECOME (33rd and 13th stemmed)). In the German Decadence corpus in German we can also observe semantic tensions between decline and renewal with frequent terms such as END (ENDE (59th)), OLD (ALT (82nd)), DEATH (TOD (100th)) and DECLINE (VERFALL (131st and 97th stemmed)) that appear in tension with recurrent terms such as NEW (NEUE/NEUE (67th and 73rd and 20th stemmed), YOUNG (JUNG (86th stemmed) and LIFE (LEBEN/LEBENS (16th and 61st and 12th stemmed)). DEVELOPMENT (ENTWICKLUNG (141st)) also appears as a recurrent term.

The recurrent pattern of tension between terms of decline and renewal can also be identified in the Swedish Decadence corpus in English where terms such as DEATH/DEAD (8th/87th); and END (59th) contrast with LIFE (14th) and NEW (32nd). A particularity of the Swedish Decadence in English corpus, however, is how the tension between renewal and decline is more visible compared to other corpora (both DEATH and LIFE are keywords whereas in other corpora LIFE and NEW are usually more prominent), there is more of an emphasis on semantics of death and decay in tension with love and life. Terms of temporal self-consciousness are also frequent in this corpus with TIME (55th) and terms of self-positioning in time such as CENTURY (13th), MODERN (81st and 62nd stemmed) and FIN DE SIÈCLE (SIÈCLE (128th) / FIN (146th)). Tensions between renewal and decline in the Swedish Decadence in Swedish corpus revolve around the frequent terms of YOUNG (UNGA (287th)) in contrast to OLD (GAMLE (305th)). The conceptualisation of TIME (TIDENS/TID/TIDEN (96th/104th/123rd)) in this corpus appears more in relation to the development of the SELF (SELV/SJÄLV/SJÄLVA (34th/65th/297th)) with terms such as LIFE (LIV/LIVET/LIFVETS (86th/117th/329th)), YOUNG (UNGA (287th)), OLD (GAMLE (305th)) and CHILD (BARN (307th)).

Decadence therefore appears to facilitate the exploration of different conceptualisations and experiences of time as well as the playing out of tensions that relate to modern temporal self-consciousness. A sense of optimism and progress, of pessimism and decline, are held together in interplay across different configurations. Decadence can therefore be understood to mediate and explore the uncertainties of living in a shifting social landscape, the anxieties of living in transformative and troubling times.

In the analyses of word frequencies in Chapter III, time and temporality also emerge as a recurrent semantic cluster. Terms that constitute the semantics of time



and temporality across the 1870s-1910s corpora suggest an interweaving of different kinds and shades of temporalities. This mediates a sense of the importance of time in the development and structuring of narratives — particularly in relation to terms of positioning in time, and terms of explicit measurement and marking of time — and a sense of an exploration and mediation of variegated experiences of time. In the Nietzsche corpus, terms of temporality emerge more in the sense of larger arcs of history with terms such as LONG (LANGE (90th and 60th stemmed)), HISTORY (GESCHICHTE (130th)), FUTURE (ZUKUNFT (213th)), GREEKS (GRIECHEN (246th)) and END (ENDE (247th)). Tensions between concepts of NEW (NEUE/NEUEN (112th and 150th and 36th stemmed)) and OLD (ALTEN/ALTE (134th/232nd and 43rd stemmed)), HISTORY (GESCHICHTE (130th)) and FUTURE (ZUKUNFT (213th)) can also be identified.

Furthermore, the domain of TIME and temporality intersects with terms that related to the development of the self (there is a tension between renewal and decline with the recurrent coupling OLD and YOUNG, but with a particular emphasis on LIFE and BECOMING). In the close reading analyses developed in the second part of Chapter III, time and temporality can be configured in relation to how narratives of development are not simply reversed into narratives of descent. Rather there is an exploration of different modes of structuring and composition in the interplay of tensions between linearity and recursion (in *Der Tod in Venedig* and *I havsbandet* in particular) and in the playing out of repetition and variation both on the intra-textual and inter-textual levels. This therefore foregrounds a logic of repetition and differentiation suggesting movements of perpetual reshaping and revision. Semantics of temporality can therefore be understood as a resource and strategy for exploring different modes of experience and understanding.

#### IV - 2 - B - SELF/WORLD

The fin de siècle has been characterised as a time in which transformative shifts in social organisation take place. This is a time when core social institutions are dissolved and reformulated, particularly notions of family, gender relations and work and leisure,<sup>10</sup> and the questioning of religious and Christian dogma.<sup>11</sup> With the industrial revolution and developments in science and technology there was a sense of the potentiality of humanity's "new inventive skills."<sup>12</sup> These transformative shifts laid open questions about how to organise social life, how to conceptualise notions of subjectivity and collectivity and the different kinds of relations that could exist between them. At this time, notions of the self and society were reformulated, and new ideas around the codification of the self were developed. The sense of potentiality instigated "an expansion of the consciousness of human possibilities and the attempts to live them."<sup>13</sup> This sense of control and potentiality gave rise to ideas about the possibilities of shaping the self, of self-fashioning and societal self-fashioning: "To be modern is not to accept oneself as one is in the flux of the passing moments; it is to take oneself as object of a complex and difficult elaboration."<sup>14</sup> Yet, there were also contemporary theories of subjectivity that instead emphasised the lack of agency of the self, such as Ernst Mach's "Empirokritizismus" (empirical criticism) in which the subject is at the

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<sup>10</sup> Thomé, pp. 22–25.

<sup>11</sup> Scobbie and Thompson, p. 10.

<sup>12</sup> Scobbie and Thompson, p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> Burrow, p. 132.

<sup>14</sup> Michel Foucault, 'What Is Enlightenment?', in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. by Paul Rabinow, trans. by Catherine Porter (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), pp. 32–50 (p. 41).

mercy of their environment, no longer master to shape and order their impressions, but rather are understood to be constructed through these.<sup>15</sup> The very notions of self and subjectivity, the previous certainties with regards to the nature and coherence of the self, became destabilised.<sup>16</sup> With the rise of sociology and psychology, society and selves became subjects/objects of study which contributed to this self-consciousness and exploration of different potential organisations and conceptualisation of self and society.<sup>17</sup> New kinds of knowledge about the self and society opened up a sense of the plurality of different ways of living and being, and yet also concomitantly led to a certain codification and restriction of the span of possibilities with the development of a sense of norm: “More precise and more statistically accurate knowledge of individuals leads to finer and more encompassing criteria for normalization.”<sup>18</sup> The study of selves opened up to view the plurality of selves and yet also led to a process of codification and normalisation:

as Foucault shows in great detail in *Discipline and Punish* and in *The History of Sexuality*, the advance of bio-power in the nineteenth century is in fact contemporary with the appearance and proliferation of the modern categories of anomaly — the delinquent, the pervert — which the technologies of discipline and confession are supposedly designed to eliminate, but never do.<sup>19</sup>

This discussion therefore already suggests the complex tensions and interrelations in the exploration and reformulation of notions of subjectivity, collectivity and meaningful life at the fin de siècle. However, there is often a particular focus on the

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<sup>15</sup> Kafitz, *Dekadenz.*, p. 10.

<sup>16</sup> Krobb, p. 550.

<sup>17</sup> Thomé, p. 16.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Rabinow, ‘Introduction’, in *The Foucault Reader*, by Michel Foucault, ed. by Paul Rabinow, trans. by Catherine Porter (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), pp. 3–29 (p. 22).

<sup>19</sup> Rabinow, p. 21.

notion of individuality and the foregrounding of individualism at the expense of collectivity and communality. Marshall, for example, notes that critics often emphasise “that there was an increasing move towards individualism in the 1890’s.”<sup>20</sup> Similarly, there is often an emphasis and foregrounding of the self and individualism in analyses of literary decadence. A recurring feature in the compilations of characteristics of literary decadence is the solitary figure of the decadent as “set apart, more fragile, more learned, more perverse, and certainly more sensitive than his contemporaries [...] watching, despising, and fearing the ‘great blonde barbarians’ (in Verlaine’s phrase), the vulgar bourgeoisie, and the teeming proletariat.”<sup>21</sup> The decadent type is a solitary figure and scholars emphasise the withdrawal, aloofness, distance and disconnection from society of these figures. Geddes highlights the particular passivity of the figure of the decadence “in whom intellectual activity predominates over the practical ability or desire to cope with everyday life, and who expresses this proclivity either in passive withdrawal or in an active rejection of accepted conventions.”<sup>22</sup> This disconnection and aloofness is conceived as a response to the transformative shifts taking place at the time: “The aloofness and disconnectedness of the protagonist are signatures of the epoch of disorientation and transition; they are staple ingredients of a kind of literature that is associated with the decadent movement.”<sup>23</sup> The emphasis on individuality therefore often goes hand in hand with a focus on passivity, disillusionment and pessimism (as discussed in the analysis above in relation to temporal self-consciousness), it is a response to the modern scientific rationalising and

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<sup>20</sup> Alan Marshall, ‘Recent Trends in Naturalist Research’, *German Life and Letters*, 33.4 (1980), 276–90 (pp. 279–80).

<sup>21</sup> Schoolfield, p. xiii.

<sup>22</sup> Geddes, ‘Swedish Fin-de-Siècle: Hjalmar Söderberg (1869-1941)’, p. 109.

<sup>23</sup> Krobb, p. 557.

commercialising of life: “The roots of this pessimism can first be seen in a growing interest in subjective experience, as opposed to the positivist ideology inspired by the commercialism of industrial society.”<sup>24</sup>

The analysis of word frequency lists can provide a sense of the different discursive tensions and configurations that point to the exploration of these cultural shifts and social debates, focussing in particular here on the tensions between notions of collectivity and individuality and how these can play out across a number of different discursive spheres. The shifts in notions of subjectivity, rather than centring on the individual as a reactive response to modern scientific and bourgeois emptying out of the self, are played out across different discursive interrelations and the through discursive tensions between individuality and collectivity.

In the Comparative/European Decadence corpus in English we can identify a tension between individuality and collectivity with terms such as SELF (17th), WORLD (7th), HUMAN (21st), SOCIETY (58th), PUBLIC (82nd), PEOPLE (103rd), WHOLE (105th). The notion of SELF (17th) therefore intersects with terms relating to SOCIAL (33rd), POLITICAL (40th and 32nd stemmed) and CULTURAL (CULTURE (108th and 34th stemmed)) issues. A number of terms suggest the unfolding of these tensions in relation to cultural and social debates about the conceptualisation and codification of LIFE/LIVING (4th and 76th stemmed) — for example, CRITIC (23rd stemmed), MORAL (51st and 31st stemmed), ORDER (73rd), POWER (64th)m VALUE (84th), REALITY (154th) and TRUE (110th). Notions of individuality and collectivity in the Comparative/European Decadence corpus in German can also be identified with terms such as SELF (SELBST (19th)), SUBJECT (SUBJEKT/SUBJEKTES (18th/70th)), PERSONALITY (PERSÖNLICHKEITEN

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<sup>24</sup> West, p. 21.

(52nd stemmed)) and ISOLATION (ISOLATION (150th)) in tension with the terms SOCIETY (GESELLSCHAFT (108th)), HUMAN (MENSCHEN/MENSCH (22nd/82nd)), CIVILISATION (ZIVILISATORISCHEN (76th)), WORLD (WELT (4th)) and TOTALITY (TOTALITÄT (146th)).

There are suggestions of the ways in which this tension between individuality and collectivity unfold unto different discursive configurations across different domains. For example, a tension between EXTERIOR (AUßENWELT (132nd) and ÄUßEREN (107th)) and INTERIOR (INNEREN/INNERE (95th/135th)) can be identified. This relates to discussions in Chapter III (in particular III-2-B) on the tensions between interiorities and exteriorities, physicality and inwardness and how this relates to mediating the reformulations and explorations of notions of subjectivity. Another configuration of the tensions between individuality and collectivity is perceptible in the word frequency analyses of the Comparative/European Decadence corpus in German with the frequent semantics of spirituality and metaphysics. The terms MYSTICAL (MYSTISCHEN (97th stemmed)), SOUL (SEELE (87th /67th stemmed)), COSMOS (KOSMOS (86th)), ABSOLUTE (ABSOLUTEN (123rd)) and WHOLE (GANZEN (119th)) in relation to the discursive domain of the SELF (SELBST (19th)) suggest approaches to decadence as exploration of the notion of self and of the metaphysical dimension of subjectivity with terms such as BEING (WESEN (100th)), EXISTENCE (EXISTENZ (153rd)), PERSONALITY (PERSÖNLICHKEITEN (52nd stemmed)) and UNCONSCIOUS (UNBEWUßTEN (105th and 69th stemmed)). Tensions between individuality and collectivity can therefore be understood as playing out in interactions with metaphysical and spiritual discourses that explore more paradigmatic notions of self in relation to whole as suggested by the terms TOTALITY (TOTALITÄT (146th)), UNITY (EINHEIT (20th)), COHESION/CONTEXT (ZUSAMMENHANG (26th)), RELATION (VERHÄLTNIS (93rd)), WHOLE (GANZEN (119th)), FORM (51st) and (MONISMUS (63rd)).

The German Decadence corpus in German also suggests how reformulations of subjectivity and collectivity interact with spiritual and metaphysical terms such as CONSCIOUSNESS (BEWUßTSEIN (188th)), SPIRIT (GEIST (166th) and SOUL (SEELE (48th)). Semantic tensions between individuality and collectivity in this corpus are evoked through the frequent terms of SELF (SELBST (13th)), PEOPLE (MENSCHEN (20th)) and SOCIETY (GESELLSCHAFT (45th)). In the German Decadence corpus in German, SELF (18th) and individuality (INDIVIDUAL (58th and 138th stemmed)) appear as frequent terms, and these are in tensions with terms of collectivity such as BODY (73rd), WHOLE (43rd), NATION (39th), CULTURE/CULTURAL (6th/56th and 3rd stemmed), PEOPLE (72nd stemmed), HUMAN (32nd and 27th stemmed), SOCIETY (88th) and WORLD (4th). Rather than intersecting with the domain of spirituality and metaphysics, in this corpus these tensions relate to political, cultural and historical contexts with terms such as GERMAN (16th), EUROPE/EUROPEAN (57th/41st), GREAT (15th and 81st stemmed), HISTORY/HISTORICAL (12th/39th), FUTURE (115th) and PAST (126th).

The tensions between individuality and collectivity in the Swedish Decadence corpus in English are also perceptible with terms such as SELF (119th), FIGURE (46th), WORLD (28th) and COMMON (77th). In this corpus, the tensions between self and collectivity appear more clearly in relation to shifting political and social issues, particularly those relating to gender with frequent terms such as WOMAN/WOMEN (4th/16th), MAN (53rd) and MOTHER (74th). Usually SELF is one of the most frequent words in these corpora — it is 18th most frequent word in German Decadence in English, 13th most frequent word in German Decadence in German, 17th most frequent terms in Comparative/European Decadence in English, 19th most frequent term in Comparative/European Decadence in German, and 34th most frequent term in Swedish Decadence in Swedish. In the Swedish Decadence in English corpus

however, WOMAN/WOMEN (4th/16th), ART (9th), DEATH (8th), CENTURY (13th) and LIFE (14th) appear as most frequent words. This points to the importance of considering the renegotiations of subjectivity in interrelation with broad cultural and social shifts taking place, and in relation to the exploration and reformulation of ways of living at the time. In the Swedish Decadence corpus in Swedish, SELF (SELV/SJÄLV/SJÄLVA (34th/65th/297th)) is a frequent term. Word frequencies in this corpus suggest how different discourses (scientific, biological, psychological, artistic) interrelate and intersect in relation to explorations of the notion of SELF and subjectivity. There are terms that relate to contemporary social issues and negotiations such as SOCIAL (SOSIALE (70th)), ECONOMIC (ØKONIMISKE (263rd)), VALUE(S) (VERDIER/VERDI (186th/245th)), PROBLEM (PROBLEM (135th)), NEW (NYA/NYE/NYTT (60th/194th/323rd)), LIFE (LIV/LIVET/LIFVETS (86th/117th/329th) and TIME (TIDENS/TID/TIDEN (96th/104th/123rd)). We can also identify terms that relates to spirituality — RELIGION/RELIGIOUS (RELIGIØSE (248th)) and BELIEF (TROR (244th)) — to the sciences with NATURE (NATUR (359th)), BIOLOGY/BIOLOGICAL (BIOLOGISKE (217th)), DOCTOR (DOKTOR (206th)) and PSYCHOLOGY (PSYKOLOGI (277th)), PERSONALITY (PERSONLIGHET (171st)) and FREUD (166th)). There are also terms that relates to LITERATURE (LITTERATUR/LITTERATUREN (74th/116th)) with NOVEL (ROMANEN/ROMAN (115th/164th)) and AUTHORSHIP (FÖRFATTARE/FÖRFATTAREN/FÖRFATTARSKAP (169th/222nd/340th)). In topic models of the Swedish Decadence corpus in Swedish, Topic 2<sup>25</sup> in the list of topics generated points to the tensions of individuality — SELF and ONESELF (SELV, SELVE, SEG SELV) — and collectivity — SOCIAL (SOSIALE), OTHERS (ANDRE) — in relation to DECADENCE (DEKADANSEN). This topic foregrounds issues of negotiating inner and

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<sup>25</sup> With parameters of 7 for number of topics and 3000 for number of iterations.



outer realities — OUTER REALITY (YTRE VIRKELIGHET), SELF and ONESELF (SELV, SELVE, SEG SELV) — and exploring relationships and connections between self and others — SOCIAL (SOSIALE), OTHERS (ANDRE), RELATIONSHIP (FORHOLD), CONNECTION (FORBINDELSE). The terms literature (LITTERÆRE), EXPRESSION (UTTRYKK) and REPRESENTATION (REPRESENTERER) that also occur in this topic suggest how literature emerges as a space for the exploration and negotiation of these issues (this will be discussed further in the following discussion of intersections of the domains ART/SELF/WORLD). These discussions of word frequencies therefore point to the re-entry between notions of collectivity and individuality in the reformulation and exploration of the self and subjectivity, and how these tensions are declined into different discursive configurations across different discursive intersections. The figure of the decadent, therefore, may not simply be “quite incapable of life”<sup>26</sup> but is perhaps rather a strategy and resource for exploring how to live and different ways of being.

In word frequency analyses in Chapter III, tensions between terms of collectivity and individuality also emerge. Similarly to the patterns that emerge in the 1920s-2010s corpora as discussed above, terms of individuality are frequent across the 1870s-1910s corpora but are usually fewer in variety compared to terms of collectivity that are usually more diverse but not as frequent individually. A number of frequent terms point towards the re-entry and tensions between individuality and collectivity; in particular, KIND in the Mann corpus, UNIQUE in the Nietzsche corpus and CASE in the Söderberg corpus put into play the self-referential and self-differentiating tensions between collectivity and individuality in the reformulations of subjectivity and social life. There are also a number of terms that relate to social titles and roles, family structures and

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<sup>26</sup> Schoolfield, p. xiv.

figures, as well as semantics of shared human experience, spirituality and human and social values. In particular, the tensions between interiority, inwardness and exteriority, physicality, play out articulations of the tensions between individuality and collectivity. In the in-depth analyses in Chapter III, I further explored a variety of modulations of the tensions between individuality and collectivity. The notion of case and type plays out tensions between singularity and exemplarity in the development of critical understanding and intellectual exploration (III-2-A). Recursive strategies, analysed in III-2-C, explore the limits and desirability of the knowability of the self. In relation to *Tonio Kröger* (in III-2-A) and *Der Tod in Venedig* (in III-2-B) and *Doktor Glas* (in III-2-C) I explored how the blurring and re-entering between interiors and exteriors enables the mediation of processes of self-exploration. Here the tensions between collectivity and individuality are re-entered through processes of cumulation and interrelation in which the self is substantiated through a web of echoing cultural and intertextual references. Furthermore, exterior events and realities are made real and make sense through webs of intertextual echoes (such as the discussion of the moon in *Doktor Glas*, cf. III-2-C). These analyses exemplify how these tensions provide strategies and resources to explore the different ways in which the self is codified and made real and different modes of subjectivity and notions of agency and meaningful life. The search for understanding the self is strongly intertwined with the search for expressing the self as will be discussed in the following section.

## IV - 2 - C - ART/SELF/WORLD

Shifts in cultural and social realities also involve and are embedded in shifts in modes of expression and perception. As discussed in the previous two sections, a certain temporal self-consciousness and subjective and social self-consciousness (with the emergence of sociology and psychology) is identifiable at the fin de siècle — and in those analyses I have highlighted how the exploration and reformulation of these aspects of cultural self-experience and self-understanding are played out through re-entries between renewal and decline (in relation to time) and individuality and collectivity (in relation to notions of subjectivity and society). This self-consciousness is also perceptible in relation to reformulations of the nature, role and function of art and the artist in the shifting cultural landscape of the fin de siècle. Art becomes distinguished and understood as cultural practice for the expression, elaboration and exploration of meaning and understanding: “art becomes the vehicle through which the reality of life is made manifest.”<sup>27</sup> In her essay “One Culture and the New Sensibility” Sontag argues that “a transformation of the function of Art” has occurred since the Industrial Revolution.<sup>28</sup> Art becomes understood as “an instrument for modifying consciousness and organising new modes of sensibility,” and artists become “self-conscious aestheticians” who engage experimentally with their art, “constantly challenging their means, their materials, and methods.”<sup>29</sup> This self-consciousness of art as cultural practice plays out in the re-entering of ART into LIFE (both are recurrently

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<sup>27</sup> Kenneth Gergen, ‘Self-Narration in Social Life’, in *Discourse. Theory and Practice*, ed. by Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor, and Simeon J. Yates (London, Thousand Oaks, CA., New Dehli: Sage, 2001), pp. 246–60 (p. 248).

<sup>28</sup> Susan Sontag, ‘One Culture and the New Sensibility’, in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, by Susan Sontag (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2009), p. 296.

<sup>29</sup> Sontag, p. 296.

most frequent words across the corpora: in German Decadence in English ART is 14th most frequent word and LIFE is 3rd, in German Decadence in German LEBEN (LIFE) is 16th most frequent word, in Swedish Decadence in English ART is 9th most frequent word and LIFE is 14th, in Swedish Decadence in Swedish LITTERATUR/LITTERATUREN (LITERATURE) is 74th/116th most frequent word and LIV/LIVET/LIFVETS (LIFE) is 86th/117th/329th, in Comparative/European Decadence in English LIFE/LIVING is 4th and 76th stemmed most frequent word and ART is 5th, and finally in Comparative/European Decadence in German LEBEN/LEBENS (LIFE) is 5th/8th most frequent word and ÄSTHETISCHEN/ÄSTHETISCHE (AESTHETIC) is 17th/39th. Art becomes understood as practice for the elaboration of meaning, and life, the self and society become understood in terms of artistic practice. North, for example, argues that society becomes aestheticised “as audiences begin to consume imaginative and symbolic materials as they had previously consumed material goods, then everyday life acquires an inherently ironic distance from itself.”<sup>30</sup> These self-conscious epistemological shifts are tied up with new forms of storing and transmitting culture and information that emerge from the boom in publishing and the subsequent development of a printing culture and an informational society.<sup>31</sup> In particular, the development of repositories of knowledge contributed to the cultural self-consciousness and self-exploration of the fin de siècle.<sup>32</sup> This cumulative and archival culture compounds modern temporal,

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<sup>30</sup> qtd in Felski, p. 507.

<sup>31</sup> Lynne Tatlock, ‘Introduction: The Book Trade and “Reading Nation” in the Long Nineteenth Century’, in *Publishing Culture and the ‘Reading Nation’*. *German Book History in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Lynne Tatlock (Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2010), pp. 1–23 (pp. 4–6); Frodeman, p. 209.

<sup>32</sup> Kirsten Belgum, ‘Documenting the Zeitgeist How the Brockhaus Recorded and Fashioned the World for Germans’, in *Publishing Culture and the ‘Reading Nation’*. *German Book History in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Lynne Tatlock (Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2010), pp. 89–117 (p. 90).

subjective and social self-consciousness and the generation and exploration of cultural practices of self-understanding and self-exploration (as explored in Chapter III-2-C).

Art therefore comes to play a particularly important role in the cultural negotiations, shifts and reformulations taking place at the fin de siècle. DeJean, for example, notes how, in times of acute cultural transformation and renegotiation, “[d]ebate about literary issues provides the forum in which the anxieties that fuel culture wars are aired.”<sup>33</sup> Strindberg’s trial for blasphemy around the publication of *Giftas I* (1884) brought to a head a number of cultural debates such as renegotiations of gender roles and relations as well as debates around religion and religious authority.<sup>34</sup> Censorship and literary trials contribute to making visible the articulation process, the renegotiation and reformulation of social and cultural reality, standards and norms. Statuer-Halsted highlights how trials can come to signify beyond the particular issues of the trial themselves in the way in which they can stand for, channel and play out major cultural and political shifts.<sup>35</sup> Stark, moreover, explores the role of literary trials and censorship of naturalist literature in relation to the subversion and reformulation cultural norms and attitudes.<sup>36</sup> Art plays a crucial role in the cultural negotiations and reformulations taking place at the fin de siècle. Tensions between art and life play out reformulations of art as particular cultural practice that mediates and explores ways of being, thinking and feeling which entails a self-consciousness of different modes of artistic expression as contingent constructions. Art as cultural practice is constituted of

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<sup>33</sup> Joan DeJean, ‘Did the Seventeenth Century Invent Our Fin de Siècle? Or, the Creation of the Enlightenment That We May at Last Be Leaving Behind’, *Critical Inquiry*, 22.4 (1996), 790–816 (p. 798).

<sup>34</sup> Scobbie and Thompson, p. 18.

<sup>35</sup> Keely Statuer-Halsted, ‘The Trial of Gustav Graef: Art, Sex, and Scandal in Late Nineteenth Century Germany. By Barnet Hartston. Review’, *German History*, 36.3 (2018), 460–61 (p. 460).

<sup>36</sup> cf. esp. Gary D. Stark, ‘The Censorship of Literary Naturalism, 1885-1895: Prussia and Saxony’, *Central European History*, 18.3–4 (1985), 326–43 (pp. 340–41).

different styles, modes, resources and strategies with which artists can experiment.

There is therefore, at this time, a certain self-consciousness of art as cultural practice for making meaning, and an exploration of different modes of expression and different aesthetics. The possibilities and limitations of art as cultural practice for making sense are explored.

The analysis of word frequency lists of 1920s-2010s corpora suggest the ways in which the reformulations of art as cultural practice is conceptualised and explored in research on decadence. In the Comparative/European Decadence corpus in English ART (5th) and LITERATURE/LITERARY (35th/30th) are related to expression of perception, understanding, expressing and making sense such as SEE (45th), VIEW (117th), MIND (52nd), THOUGHT (65th), EXPERIENCE (98th), IDEAS/IDEA (122nd/124th), SENSE (39th), MEAN (84th and 20th stemmed), NAMING (82nd stemmed), EXPRESSIVE/EXPRESSION (53rd stemmed), REALITY (154th), TRUE (110th), LANGUAGE (115th), WORDS (83rd and 26th stemmed), FORM/FORMS (19th/23rd and 9th stemmed) and STYLE (74th). In the Comparative/European Decadence corpus in German: ART (KUNST (29th)) and LITERATURE (LITERATUR (28th)) and related terms such as AESTHETIC (ÄSTHETISCHEN/ÄSTHETISCHE (17th/39th)) and POETRY/FICTION (DICHTUNG (72nd)) also appear in tension with semantics of understanding, reflection, perception and perspective — THINK (DENKEN (165th)), CONCEPTION (VORSTELLUNG (152nd)), KNOWLEDGE (ERKENNTNIS (139th)), MEANING (BEDEUTET/BEDEUTUNG (133rd/118th and 79th stemmed)), SENSE (SINNE/SINN (44th/59th)), LOOK (BLICK (58th)). A particular modulation of the exploration of art as cultural practice of making sense plays out around terms that relate to metaphysical and monistic semantics of searching for coherence, unity and wholeness — TOTALITY (TOTALITÄT (146th)), UNITY (EINHEIT (20th)), COHESION/CONTEXT (ZUSAMMENHANG (26th)), RELATION (VERHÄLTNIS (93rd)),

WHOLE (GANZEN (119th)), FORM (51st), MONISM (MONISMUS (63rd)). Semantic of searching and experimenting (SEARCH (SUCHE (130th)) and DEVELOPMENT (ENTWICKLUNG (69th)) suggest the experimentation with different modes of expression and making sense in the exploration for shaping and giving FORM (51st), to EXISTENCE (EXISTENZ (153rd)), EXPERIENCE (ERLEBEN (128th) and ERFAHRUNGEN (55th stemmed)) and WORLDVIEW (WELTBILD (114th)) and WELTANSCHAUUNG (100th stemmed)).

In the Swedish Decadence corpus in English, frequent words related to art (POEM/POETRY/POEMS (3rd/10th/18th), such as PAINTING (24th) and COLOR (50th)), are particularly strongly associated with terms of perception — SENSE (127th) and SEEING (76th) VISUAL (23rd)) — as well as to practices of making sense and meaningful elaboration (FORM (45th), FIGURE (46th), LANGUAGE (27th), WORDS (85th), IDEA (111th), SENSE (127th)). Topic models of this corpus foreground how artistic practices are themselves undergoing experimentation, change and exploration as practices of meaningful creation. In particular, Topic 0<sup>37</sup> focusses on the POEMS and POETRY of LEVERTIN, yet it is clear how POEM/POEMS/POETRY, literature and LANGUAGE intersect with notions of ART, VISUAL, PAINTING, COLOUR. Intersections between art forms, such as ekphrasis as exemplified in this topic, could be understood again in the framework of articulation and re-entry: different genres of art re-entering one another in order to explore new modes and practices of creativity and making sense. In the Swedish Decadence corpus in Swedish, NOVEL (ROMANEN/ROMAN (115th/164th)), LITERATURE (LITTERATUR/LITTERATUREN (74th/116th)), and AUTHORSHIP (FÖRFATTARE/FÖRFATTAREN/FÖRFATTARSKAP (169th/222nd/340th)) are frequent terms, and interrelate with other cultural practices of making sense such as PSYCHOLOGY

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<sup>37</sup> With parameters of 7 for number of topics and 3000 for number of iterations.

(PSYKOLOGI (277th)), RELIGION/RELIGIOUS (RELIGIØSE (248th)) and BIOLOGY/BIOLOGICAL (BIOLOGISKE (217th)). The semantics of understanding and expression as related to practices of making are also frequent with terms such as CONCEPT (BEGREPET (333rd)), MEANING (BETYDNING (192nd)), EXPRESSION (UTTRYKK (157th)), REPRESENT (REPRESENTERER (154th)) and WORD (ORD (168th)). Similarly to the Swedish Decadence corpus in English, terms that relate to perception and perspective are also frequent — PERSPECTIVE (PERSPEKTIV (238th)), SEEM/APPEAR (SYNES (232nd)), SEE (SER (83rd)), VISION/VIEW/SIGHT (SYN (269th)) and EYE (ÖGON (253rd)). Furthermore, a number of frequent concepts relation to elaborating coherence and meaning with terms such as RELATION (FORHOLD/FORHOLDET/FÖRHÅLLANDE (54th/191st/361st)), CONNECTION (FORBINDELSE (153rd)), CONTEXT or CONNECTION or COHERENCE (SAMMENHENG (177th)), MOTIF (MOTIVET (181st)) and FORM (FORM (229th)). Art is therefore contextualised as a practice amongst other cultural practices for making sense and for searching and elaborating meaning and understanding. Epistemological processes related to understanding are also linked to semantics of perception. For example, in topic modelling of this corpus, Topic 0<sup>38</sup> suggests how SELF and self-reflection (SJÄLVA) intersects with LITERATURE (LITTERÄRA/LITTERATUR) and AUTHOR (FÖRFATTARE), WORD (ORD) and SHORT STORY (NOVELLEN) as well as terms SEE (SER) and SHOW (VISAR). This evokes the notion of literature as practice for exploration and mediation of the self through different ways (SÄTT) of seeing and showing.

ART (KUNST (15th and 23rd stemmed)) and LITERATURE (LITERATUR (17th and 29th stemmed)) are also frequently recurrent concepts in the German Decadence corpus in German and intersect with tensions between perception and epistemology —

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<sup>38</sup> With parameters of 7 for number of topics and 3000 for number of iterations.



CONSCIOUSNESS (BEWUßTSEIN (188th)), REALITY (WIRKLICHKEIT (90th and 67th stemmed)) and SENSES/SENSE (SINNE/SINN (68th/113th)). These interrelate with terms of expression and making sense such as CONCEPT (BEGRIFF (36th and 27th stemmed)), MEANING (BEDEUTUNG (101st)), EXPRESSION (AUSDRUCK (78th)), SHAPE (GESTALT (183rd)) and FORM (FORM (52nd)). Topic modelling of this corpus suggests, particular in Topic 0,<sup>39</sup> how ART (KUNST) can be conceived as cultural practice for making sense (FORM (FORM) and EXPRESSION (AUSDRUCK)), and as practice for the (re)negotiation of fundamental issues such as the nature of subjectivity and how it related to tensions between individuality and collectivity (SOUL (SEELE), SELF (SELBST) and PEOPLE (MENSCHEN) and WORLD (WELT) and CULTURE (KULTUR)). This is also related to modern temporal self-consciousness with terms such as TIME (ZEIT) and HISTORY (GESCHICHTE) and ANTIQUITY (ANTIKE)). The discursive configurations and tensions explored in these analyses, whilst made distinct for analytical clarity, all interrelate and overlap in fundamental ways. ART (14th) (and PHILOSOPHY (100th)) are recurrent terms in the German Decadence corpus in English. In corpora weighted towards research on literary and artistic decadence, it is expected that a number of terms that relate to art and literature should be prominent. More interesting perhaps is how terms related to art emphasise art as cultural practice for meaningful elaboration, for making-sense. For example, frequent terms include FORM (11th), WHOLE (43rd), MEANING (110th and 23rd stemmed), EXPRESSION (133rd and 47th stemmed), SENSE (24th and 31st stemmed), EXPERIENCE (136th), IDEALS (73rd), FEELING (90th and 150th stemmed). As a further example, in topic modelling of this corpus, Topic 2<sup>40</sup> revolves around the figure of THOMAS MANN, and his protagonists TONIO KRÖGER and HANNO BUDDENBROOK. A

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<sup>39</sup> With parameters of 5 for number of topics and 3000 for number of iterations.

<sup>40</sup> With parameters of 10 for number of topics and 3000 for number of iterations.

number of terms in this discursive configuration suggest ART and WRITING conceptualised as a PROCESS for exploring the INDIVIDUAL and CONSCIOUSNESS, and how this intersects with the POLITICAL and SOCIETY and LIFE more broadly.<sup>41</sup> We can detect here the conceptual tensions of ART, ARTISTIC, and SOCIETY and LIFE which suggests the reformulations and explorations of processes of making sense through the re-entering of art and life as discussed above, and in Chapter III in relation to *Tristan*, *Tonio Kröger* and *Der Tod in Venedig*. Furthermore, art as particular practice and space for the playing out of key cultural and social issues at the time is perceptible in the discursive configurations suggested in Topic 4<sup>42</sup> which revolve around the figures of ARTISTS, WRITERS and CRITICS and notions of ART, LITERATURE, SOCIAL and SOCIETY. This suggests the intersections of the notions of LITERARY DECADENCE and SOCIAL CRITICISM (particularly in relation to the HAUTE BOURGEOISIE, RULING CLASS or UPPER CLASS).

In the word frequency analyses of 1870s-1910s corpora in Chapter III, the frequency and intersections of semantics of human experience and expression, semantics of perception and understanding, and semantics of human and social values point to the interrelations between the self-consciousness and exploration of different modes of expression and understanding, and the renegotiations of human and social values and experiences. The semantics of understanding and perception play out re-entries between interiority and exteriority. Epistemological activities of understanding are rooted through terms of physical perception (that relate in particular to eyes and

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<sup>41</sup> It is noteworthy that a frequent phrase that recurs in this topic is BALANCING ACT which suggests how scholars have approached these artistic works by THOMAS MANN as exploring different ways of relating and balancing the conflicting demands of ART, ARTISTIC, and SOCIETY and LIFE.

<sup>42</sup> With parameters of 10 for number of topics and 3000 for number of iterations.

seeing). In the Strindberg, Söderberg and Mann corpora, perception, with its blurring of physicality and understanding, is more frequent, whereas in Nietzsche more general terms of understanding, questioning and reflecting are more frequent. However, SEE/SEES (SEHEN/SIEHT (108th/193rd)) is still recurrent in the Nietzsche corpus, as are re-entries between epistemological activities and physical processes such as REASON (VERNUNFT (189th)) and FEELING (GEFÜHL (175th)); SENSES/SENSES (SINNE/SINN (170th/173rd and 75th stemmed)) and INSTINCT (INSTINKT (228th)) — and this is discussed in III-2-A in relation to the re-entering of mind and body in *Der Fall Wagner*. This points to the experimentation with different modes of expression in the way in which literature drawing on decadence resources develops an “aesthetic expression of perception and cognition derived from embodied experience.”<sup>43</sup> This is further discussed in the more in-depth analyses in relation to the notion of metaphysical mimesis in III-2-B — where realistic descriptions of physical and exteriorised figures and environment stand in for inner states and processes of mind. In III-2-C, I explored how the experimentation with different modes of expression is made explicit through the embedding of different genres within the narratives. This serves to make visible artistic practice as contingent process of meaningful elaboration, and is highlighted further through recursive strategies in the narrative that foreground the text itself as construction and creation by pointing to the intertextual processes through which it is created. Recursive strategies (embedding art within art, selves within selves) highlight the elaboration of texts and selves as contingent processes of (re)signification. In this way, these texts self-consciously explore and expose the process of creating meaning

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<sup>43</sup> Gabriel Lovatt, ‘From Experiment to Epidemic: Embodiment in the Decadent Modernism of Arthur Machen’s “The Great God Pan” and “The Inmost Light”’, *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 49.1 (2016), 19–35 (p. 20).

and understanding in order to explore the limitations and possibilities of meaningful elaboration.

In these analyses, I have explored recurring discursive tensions and interrelations in research literature on decadence from the 1920s to 2010s. These recurring tensions and interrelations can help formalise the ways in which different aspects of the fin de siècle cultural landscape feed into one another. Furthermore, they highlight the productivity of conceptualising decadence in terms of discursive resource and strategy that play out processes of articulation and re-entry since these tensions and interrelations highlight how the research on decadence is structured around the exploration and playing out of discursive tensions and interrelations. Recurring features across these corpora are semantics of temporal self-consciousness, of development and change, and these developments and changes intersect with notions of perspective, positioning and sense-making in relation to aspects of society and aspects of subjectivity. This suggests a focus on decadence as (re)negotiations of foundational notions of self and broader social values and aspects of social organisation. These discussions also demonstrate how computational deformances of sources do not provide analyses *per se*, but can help with formalise and reframe analyses through processes of reduction and reconfiguration along different analytical lines. Exploring higher-level patterns of cumulation and distribution can help formalise the tensions and intersections in processes of articulation at the time, and can also help formalise the intersections and interrelations between core discursive domains (in order to articulate more flexibly the interrelations between the artistic sphere and broader cultural and social domains, for example). Furthermore, the analyses developed in this section serve to contextualise further the analyses developed in Chapter III both in relation to the fin de siècle cultural context and in relation to previous research on decadence —

this further highlights the potentials of approaching decadence as playing out processes of (re)signification, as strategy and resource in the elaboration of meaning. In the following part of this chapter, I will compare discursive patterns of the Decadence corpora with Modernity, Fin de Siècle and Degeneration corpora. These analyses further explore the liminality and ambiguity of decadence in terms of facilitating and stimulating processes of re-entry and articulation — the significant overlaps and differences between the Decadence corpora and the Modernity, Fin de siècle and Degeneration corpora suggest how decadence can be understood as functioning through self-reference and self-differentiation with these other corpora, as facilitating processes of re-entry by functioning as unmarked side and field of discursivity for these other corpora.

#### **IV - 3 - Decadence as Troubling Process: Comparison of Discursive Patterns in Decadence Corpora with Discursive Patterns in Modernity, Fin de Siècle and Degeneration Corpora**

Patterns of self-reference and self-differentiation between the Decadence, Degeneration, Fin de Siècle and Modernity corpora can already be identified when surveying the frequencies and occurrences of these different categorical labels across the different corpora. In the Decadence corpora, for example, concepts of MODERN and MODERNITY are frequently recurrent across all corpora. However, in the Modernity corpora, DECADENCE is no longer a recurrent term (cf. Tables 1 and 2 below). In short, MODERNITY (and associated terms) recurs as frequent concept across Decadence

corpora, however DECADENCE does not recur frequently across Modernity corpora (an exception is the Swedish Modernity corpus in English where decadence still does occur as relatively frequent concept). Whilst DECADENCE does intersect with FIN DE SIÈCLE and DEGENERATION in certain corpora, the recurrence of frequencies of words related to MODERNITY in the Decadence corpora, and the absence of DECADENCE in the Modernity corpora point towards a particular process of self-reference and self-differentiation between decadence and modernity, in other words, the re-entering of decadence in modernity underpins much of the scholarly conceptualisation of decadence.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> The exceptions, such as the Swedish Decadence in English corpus, suggest other productive avenues, such as considering romanticism as re-entering decadence which also suggests particularities linked to cultural context, such as the popularity of neo-romanticism in Swedish literature around the 1890s cf. e.g. Geddes, *Hj. Söderberg: Doktor Glas*, p. 31). Topic modelling of the German Decadence corpus in German also suggests the different approaches to decadence. In Topic 1, we can identify an approach more centred around the French context: the terms DÉCADENCE, DÉCADENT/DÉCADENTS and FIN DE SIÈCLE are recurrent. Key figures include WAGNER, BAUDELAIRE and HUYSMANS, and frequent texts here are DORIAN GRAY, TOD IN VENEDIG, FLEURS DU MAL, À REBOURS (and des ESSSEINTES). Also mentioned are Nietzsche's *Der Fall WAGNER*, and WAGNER's opera *TRISTAN UND ISOLDE*. Decadence here is linked to LITERATURE (LITTERATUR) as well as music through WAGNER (WAGNERSCHER MUSIK). Decadence seems to be approached as a term (TERMINUS DÉCADENCE); a literature (LITTÉRATURE (de) DÉCADENCE), and even a movement (MOUVEMENT DÉCADENT). The notion of TIME (ZEIT) is recurrent as well as a sense of belatedness (SPÄTER). In Topic 2, by contrast, the terms DÉCADENCE, DEKADENZ and MODERN are frequent as well as NATURALISM (NATURALISMUS). As in Topic 1 decadence is linked to LITERATURE (LITTERATUR/LITERARISCHEN) — both LITERARY DÉCADENCE (LITERARISCHE DÉCADENCE) and LITERARY MODERNISM (LITERARISCHE MODERNE) occur — but also more specifically the NOVEL (ROMAN) as well as ART in general (KUNST). This topic also includes the notion of CONCEPT (BEGRIFF) and CONTEXT (ZUSAMMENHANG). Figures include THOMAS MANN and MAX NORDAU (and HERMANN BAHR). And texts that appears here are Nordau's *ENTARTUNG*, Bahr's *ÜBERWINDUNG DES NATURALISMUS*, Nietzsche's *ECCE HOMO* and MANN's *BUDDENBROOKS*. This also shows how the approach in this thesis can provide ways of formalising the different approaches to decadence throughout the research literature by conceptualising decadence as process of re-entry and by exploring cumulative patterns of distribution across different research corpora.

	Decadence	Modern/Modernity	Naturalism	Fin de Siècle	Degeneration	Romanticism
German Decadence in English	decadence (23rd) decadent (93rd)	modern (59th/21st stemmed)				
German Decadence in German	décadence/décadent (4th/130th)  dekadenz/dekadenten (24th/57th)	moderne/modernen (28th/98th and 25th stemmed)	naturalismus (75th)	fin de siècle (siècle (146th) / fin (154 <sup>th</sup> ))	entartung (178th)	
Swedish Decadence in English	decadent/décadence (2nd/20th)	modern (81st and 62nd stemmed)		fin de siècle (siècle (128th) / fin (146 <sup>th</sup> ))		romantic (108th)
Swedish Decadence in Swedish	dekadansen dekadanse dekadente dekadenten dekadent (69th/76th/94th/160th/172nd)	moderna/modern/moderne (202nd/223rd/311th)				
Comparative/European Decadence in English	decadence/decadent (2nd/3rd)	modern (29th and 15th stemmed)		fin de siècle (fin (164th) / siècle (171st))		
Comparative/European Decadence in German	dekadenz/dekadenten (14th/41st)	moderne/modernen (6th/23rd)	naturalismus (136th)			

Table 1 Frequencies of Categorical Labels across the Decadence Corpora

	Modern/Modernity	Decadence	Naturalism
German Modernity in English	modern (7th) modernity (10th) modernism (127th)		
German Modernity in German	moderne/modernen (4th/14th)		
Swedish Modernity in English	modernist (21st) modernism (31st) modern (46th)	decadence (141st)	
Swedish Modernity in Swedish	moderna/moderne/modern (34th/42nd/271st) genombrottet (266th)		naturalism (349th)

Table 2 Frequencies of Categorical Labels across the Modernity Corpora

### Decadence and Modernity:

If we compare the most frequent words in the Modernity and Decadence corpora, we can identify striking similarities: NEW (8th), LIFE (9th) and ART (3rd), WORLD (5th) NEW (8th), LIFE (9th) are the most frequent words in the German Modernity corpus in English, and they are also the most frequent words in the German decadence in English corpus — WORLD (4th), NEW (13th), LIFE (3rd) and ART (14th). Similarly, in the German Modernity in German corpus, SELF (SELBST (9th)), TIME (ZEIT (25th)), WORLD (WELT (20th)) and PEOPLE (MENSCHEN (18th)) are some of the most frequent words in this corpus as they are in the German Decadence in German corpus — SELF (SELBST (13th)), TIME (ZEIT (18th)), WORLD (WELT (19th)) and PEOPLE (MENSCHEN (20th)). In the Swedish Modernity in English, most frequent words include WOMAN/WOMEN (4th /16th),



POEM/POETRY/POEMS (3rd/10th/18th) and ART (9th), LIFE (14th) and CENTURY (13th). This does not map exactly word to word with the most frequent terms in the Swedish Modernity corpus in English, but the meaning of the words are closely related: the frequent word LIFE (8th) is identical, but rather than WOMAN/WOMEN we have GENDER (5th), rather than POETRY and ART we have LITERARY/LITERATURE (13th/15th), instead of century we have NEW (4th) and TIME (7th). A divergence here is instead of DEATH (8th) in the Swedish Decadence corpus in English, LOVE (16th) is a frequent term in the Swedish Modernity in English corpus. Finally, in the Swedish Modernity corpus in Swedish, SELF (SELV/SJÄLV/SJÄLVA (46th/65th/128th)), NEW (NYA/NYE/NYTT (22nd/149th/286th)), TIME (TID/TIDENS/TIDEN (55th/82nd/124th)), LIFE (LIV/LIVET/LIVETS (58th/78th/234th)) and LITERATURE (LITTERÄRA/ LITTERATUR (67th/75th)) are among the most frequent terms. These are mirrored in the Swedish Decadence corpus in Swedish which features SELF (SELV/SJÄLV/SJÄLVA (34th/65th/297th)), NEW (NYA/NYE/NYTT (60th/194th/323rd)), TIME (TIDENS/TID/TIDEN (96th/104th/123rd)), LIFE (LIV/LIVET/LIFVETS (86th/117th/329th)) and LITERATURE (LITTERATUR/LITTERATUREN (74th/116th)) among its most frequent words. There are therefore significant overlaps in the most frequent words across these corpora which point to how they can be understood to overlap in terms of the overarching and higher level discursive domains I use to analytically organise my analyses (i.e. the domains of SELF, TIME, WORLD and ART). However, a closer look at patterns of discursive tension and interrelation across word frequency lists suggests overlaps as well as distinction in terms of how these domains intersect and interrelate into discursive configurations.

Overall, tensions between renewal and decline in the TIME/SELF/WORLD domain are not as marked in the Modernity corpora compared to the Decadence corpora. For example, in the German Modernity corpus in English TIME (22nd), NEW

(8th), CENTURY (29th) and HISTORY/HISTORICAL (39th/53rd) are still frequent concepts with similar frequencies compared to the German Decadence corpus in English — TIME (8th), NEW (13th), CENTURY (29th) and HISTORY (12th). However, whilst in the German Decadence in English corpus there was more a sense of tensions between renewal and decline, of self-reference and self-differentiation between different temporality (with terms such as OLD (63rd), PAST (126th) and NEW (13th), FUTURE (11th)), in the German Modernity in English corpus, terms that suggest demarcation and rupture are more frequent (for example, TRADITION (125th and 43rd stemmed), MOVEMENT (102nd), REACTIONARY (88th), REVOLUTION (59th), ANTI (36th)). Similarly, in the Swedish Modernity in English corpus terms of TIME (7th) and CENTURY (28th) are comparably frequent to time (55th) and CENTURY (13th) in the Swedish Decadence in English corpus. However, the tension between renewal and decline that was visible in Swedish Decadence in English corpus is no longer as marked in the Swedish Modernity in English corpus. Terms such as NEW (4th), YOUNG (42nd), CHANGE (94th stemmed) and TRADITIONAL (135th) are more frequent compared to terms such as END (102nd), OLD (108th) and DEATH (112th) and emphasise renewal and temporal distinction rather than continuities.

In relation to the domain of SELF/WORLD, tensions between collectivity and individuality do still seem to appear in the Modernity corpora, however there are suggestions of variation in how these tensions play out and re-enter one another into different kinds of discursive configurations compared to the Decadence corpora. In the German Modernity corpus in English, for example, SELF (105th) is not a particularly frequent term, whereas in the German Decadence corpus in English it appears rather more frequently (18th most frequent term). Rather than self the term INDIVIDUAL (54th and 131st stemmed) is more frequent in the German Modernity

corpus in English (58th in the German Decadence in English). Furthermore, terms of collectivity are similar but more numerous compared to terms of collectivity in the German Decadence in English corpus and the notion of PUBLIC (93rd) appears here, which did not emerge as frequent in the German Decadence in English corpus. Similar terms of collectivity and individuality appear with similar frequency in the German Modernity corpus in German compared to the German Decadence corpus in German, however terms of SOCIAL (SOZIALEN (17th and 29th stemmed)) and MOVEMENT (BEWEGUNG (127th)) appear in the Modernity corpus that did not appear in the Decadence corpus. Furthermore, whilst there are terms of INWARDNESS (INNEREN (77th)), SUBJECTIVITY (SUBJECTIVITÄT (138th)), and EXPERIENCE (ERFAHRUNG (102nd and 63rd stemmed)) here that did not appear in the Decadence corpus, there are not as many terms of spirituality and consciousness as in the German Decadence in German corpus — CONSCIOUSNESS (BEWUßTSEIN (188th)), SOUL (SEELE (48th)), SPIRIT (GEIST (166th)) and SENSES/SENSE (SINNE/SINN (68th/113th))) — which suggests a different kind of configuration of inwardness and subjectivity. In the Swedish Modernity corpus in Swedish SELF (SELV/SJÄLV/SJÄLVA (46th/65th/128th)) is still a frequent concept as in the Swedish Decadence corpus in Swedish (SELV/SJÄLV/SJÄLVA (34th/65th/297th)). However, there are more terms of collectivity in the Swedish Modernity corpus in Swedish — WORLD (VÄRLD/VERLDEN (152nd/174th)), SOCIAL (SOCIALA / SOCIAL (169th / 228th)), SOCIETY (SAMHÄLLET (200th)), PEOPLE (MÄNNISKOR (285th)) and PEOPLE/PEOPLE of a nation (FOLK (221st)) are frequent compared to SOCIAL (SOSIALE (70th)) in the Swedish Decadence in Swedish corpus. There is also more of an emphasis on the demands of social and collective roles of the individual — with terms such as DEMAND (KRAV (182nd)), ROLE (ROLL (234th)), RELATIONSHIP (FORHOLD/ FÖRHÅLLANDEN (390th)), POSITION

(STÄLLNING (287th)), STRUGGLE (KAMP/KAMPEN (257th/433rd)), RADICAL (RADIKALA (360th)) and POWER (MAKT (324th)). Similarly, in the Swedish Modernity corpus in English there are more terms that relate to collectivity and to the codification of the SELF (73rd) in SOCIAL (33rd) roles compared to the Swedish Decadence corpus in English. In the Swedish Decadence in English corpus, frequent terms of collectivity are WORLD (28th) and COMMON (77th). In comparison, in the Swedish Modernity corpus in English, PEOPLE (133rd), HUMAN (74th), CLASS (96th and 72nd stemmed) / MIDDLE (83rd), PUBLIC (50th), WORLD (56th), SOCIETY (57th) relate to semantics of collectivity, and a number of terms emphasise the positioning of the self in relation collectivity such as PLACE (119th), ORDER (125th) and ROLE (143rd). Furthermore, whilst in both the Swedish Modernity and Swedish Decadence in English corpora terms relating to gender are frequently recurrent they become more diversified in the Swedish Modernity corpus. In the Swedish Decadence in English corpus, WOMEN/WOMEN (4th/16th), MAN (53rd) and MOTHER (74th) relate to gender roles and relations. Whereas in the Swedish Modernity corpus in English WOMEN/WOMAN (1st/6th), GENDER (5th), FEMININITY (89th), MEN (11th), FAMILY (47th), CHILDREN (55th), MOTHER (81st), WIFE (84th), MARRIAGE (90th) and HUSBAND (124th) relate to gender roles and relations.

In relation to the domains of ART/SELF/WORLD, the conceptualisation of art as cultural practice for exploring, expressing and formulating meaning recurs with striking similarities across both the Modernity and the Decadence corpora. Terms relating to art, perception, expression, understanding are frequent across both sets of corpora. Variations between the corpora are detectable, particularly in relation to how there are more terms that relate to the codification of art as cultural practice in the Modernity corpora as well as terms that emphasise distinction and coherence.

For example, in the German Modernity corpus in German terms that suggest a stronger codification and institutionalisation of art as cultural practice could include THEORIE (85th) and MOVEMENT (BEWEGUNG (127th)). The terms UNITY (EINHEIT (76th)), coherence or CONTEXT (ZUSAMMENHANG (101st)), DIFFERENCE (UNTERSCHIED (72nd stemmed)), SPECIFIC (SPEZIFISCHES (104th stemmed)) and PRECISION (GENAUIGKEIT (107th stemmed)) are terms that do not appear frequently in the German Decadence in German corpus and suggest a sense of starker distinction and coherence. Similarly, whereas in the German Decadence in English corpora there was more of a general sense of art as cultural practice for the exploration and expression of meaning, in the German Modernity corpus in English there are frequent terms that relate to the institutionalisation and codification of art as cultural practice with terms such as ARTISTS (34th), MOVEMENT (102nd), SECESSION (18th), EXHIBIT/EXHIBITIONS (44th stemmed), CRITIC (35th stemmed), THEORY (96th), ANALYSIS (45th).

### **Decadence and Fin de Siècle:**

Fin de Siècle word frequencies overlap with Decadence word frequencies in terms of SELF, and TIME and ART, but there is a much greater prominence of issues of SOCIAL, POLITICAL and CULTURAL debates and contention in the Fin de Siècle corpora which therefore points to overlaps with certain corpora related to Decadence but not particularly with Modernity corpora. In particular, we can observe the recurrent prominence across Fin de Siècle corpora of terms related to SEXUAL/SEXUALITY, GENDER, FAMILY structures and figures (MOTHER, FATHER, CHILD/CHILDREN also the figure of the ADOLESCENT in sources on European/Comparative Fin de Siècle in English and in sources on French Fin de Siècle in English) and CLASS (i.e. MIDDLE

CLASS/BOURGEOIS/BÜRGERTUM) issues. There are also a number of frequent terms that evoke regulation or codification of these socio-cultural issues such as MORAL/MORALITY, CRIME/CRIMINALITY, MEDICALISATION, psychology with the recurrent figure of FREUD, the frequently recurrent term CASE (FALL) and notions of CULTURE/CULTURAL and NATURE/NATURAL. Another prominent semantic field rather specific to Fin de Siècle corpora is the field of theatricality, posing and acting evoked through terms such as ROLE, CHARACTER and FASHIONING. In particular, in the French Fin de siècle corpus in French words such as CARNAVAL (66th), COSTUME (68th), MASQUE (36th), CARICATURE (116th stemmed) are recurrent, and in the French Fin de siècle corpus in English political ceremonies are discussed as PERFORMANCE (47th), SPECTACLE (46th), STAGE (104th) and RITUAL (102nd).

### **Decadence and Degeneration:**

The Degeneration corpora overlap with the Decadence corpora in terms of the overarching discursive domains (of SELF, TIME, ART and SOCIAL, POLITICAL and CULTURAL issues), but these corpora appear more as a particular discursive configuring of issues that are present in the Decadence corpora. Both in the Decadence and the Degeneration corpora there is a particular emphasis on contentious areas of SOCIAL, POLITICAL and CULTURAL discussion, but in the Degeneration corpora there is a focus on areas related to identity such as FAMILY (MOTHER, FATHER, CHILD/CHILDREN, MARRIAGE), CLASS, SEXUALITY and terms of regulation and codification of these issues (with for example recurrently frequent notions of MORAL/MORALITY and STATE and LAW/LAWS). Furthermore, in the Degeneration corpora these issues are further filtered through semantics of SCIENCE, BIOLOGY, EVOLUTION, MEDICINE/MEDICALISATION, ILLNESS/DISEASE/PATHOLOGY, PSYCHIATRY and RACE/RACIAL issues (all of which

frequently recur across all Degeneration corpora). Similarly, rather than the term SELF which is more recurrently frequent in Decadence corpora (whereas it only appears explicitly in three out of the seven subcorpora: in the German Degeneration in English corpus (45th), in the European/Comparative Degeneration corpora — both in English (80th) and German (8th)), the terms MIND/MENTAL and BODY/BODIES/PHYSICAL are more recurrently frequent concepts across the Degeneration corpora.

Terms of collectivity (such as HUMAN, SOCIETY, CLASS, VOLK) and exemplary individuality (for example the FAMILY figures and roles mentioned above) are also frequently recurrent in the Degeneration corpora. This relates to the recurrent discursive tensions between collectivity and individuality (as observed across the Decadence corpora), however in the Degeneration corpora, these tensions intersect around the particular notions of CASE, TYPE and FIGURE — FIGURE (82nd and 74th stemmed) and CASE (121st) are frequent in corpus of sources on British Degeneration in English, FIGURE (53rd) is also recurrent in sources on French Degeneration in English, in the corpus on French Degenerations in German the notions of CASE (FALL (62nd)) and TYPE (TYPUS/TYPE (41st/71st)) are frequently recurrent, TYPES (135th) is also relatively frequent in sources on Comparative/European Degeneration in English, and finally, FIGURE or FORM (GESTALT (72nd)) is relatively frequent in the Comparative/European Degeneration corpus in German.

A further discursive modulation that is particular to the Degeneration corpora but also draws on resources present in the Decadence corpora, emerges at the intersectional tensions between semantics of collectivity and individuality and semantics of time and temporality (in particular the codifications of development whether on individual or more systemic/cultural scales). These are the discursive configurations that relate to semantics of HEREDITY (83rd) and INHERITANCE (37th

stemmed) in the British Degeneration corpus in English, GENEALOGY (65th and 19th stemmed) in the French Degeneration corpus in English, HEREDITY (ERBLICHKEIT (17th)), INHERITANCE/HEREDITY (VERERBUNG (35th)) and DESCENT (DESCENDENZ (114th)) in the French Degeneration corpus in German, HEREDITY (131st) the Comparative/European Degeneration in English corpus, FATE (192nd) in the German Degeneration corpus in English, and HEREDITY (ERBLICHKEIT (85th stemmed)) in the German Degeneration corpus in German.

Significant areas and processes of self-reference and self-differentiation can therefore be identified in the comparison of word frequency patterns between the Decadence corpora and the Modernity, Fin de Siècle and Degeneration corpora. The semantics of theatricality, acting and posing (identified as particular to the Fin de Siècle corpora) and the notion of case (recurrent in the Degeneration corpora), for example, both feature and are discussed in close readings in Chapter III (the notion of case in relation to Nietzsche's *Der Fall Wagner*; and the topic of theatricality, acting and posing in relation to Söderberg's *Doktor Glas*). Modernity and Decadence corpora in particular overlap and differentiate significantly. The relations between decadence in comparison to modernity, fin de siècle and degeneration can therefore be productively understood in terms of processes of articulation and re-entry. The patterns of self-reference and self-differentiation that emerge from word frequency comparisons between these corpora suggest how decadence can function as unmarked side in the re-entry and field of discursivity in the articulation of the understanding of these different categorical labels. Decadence provides resources of self-reference and self-differentiation for these different corpora in the process of their definition. I would argue that this points to the value of the analytical reframing of decadence in terms of dynamics of (re)signification and elaboration of meaning. Rather than seeking to define the



substantive particularities of decadence in contrast to other movements and discourses at the fin de siècle, decadence can rather be understood as a semantic strategy and discursive resource which opens up the discursive possibilities (the field of discursivity) that span fin de siècle culture and enables an array intersections and interrelation of these resources into different discursive configurations. This approach therefore offers useful ways of formalising and conceptualising these complex dynamics of interrelation.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I explored the discursive patterns across research corpora on decadence between 1920s-2010s. I structured my analyses along the intersections of fundamental discursive domains (TIME, SELF, WORLD and ART) abstracted from frequently recurrent terms and semantic strands across the corpora (IV-1). Throughout the second part of the chapter, IV-2, I explored how, at the intersections of these fundamental domains (TIME/SELF/WORLD, SELF/WORLD, ART/SELF/WORLD), a number of discursive tensions and interrelations could be identified as unfolding different ways of configuration and conceptualising the intersections of these domains. Decadence is therefore conceptualised as encompassing and unfolding discursive tensions and interrelations at the intersection of broad domains of modern self-understanding and self-experience. At the intersections of TIME/SELF/WORLD (IV-2-A), discursive patterns suggest a particular temporal self-consciousness emerging at the time. Shifts in the conceptualisation of time and temporal experience are analysed as processes of

re-entry between pessimism and optimism, decline and renewal. Semantics of time and temporality were also recurrent in word frequency analyses of the 1870s-1910s corpora and re-presented a sense of interweaving of different kinds and shades of temporalities, and the exploration of different compositional logics along patterns of repetition and variation which relates to the pluralisation and self-consciousness of the experience and conceptualisation of time at the fin de siècle.

In section IV-2-B, fundamental shifts in the social and cultural landscape of the fin de siècle brought about reformulations of notions of self and subjectivity, society and social life. The re-entry of notions of subjectivity and collectivity at the intersections of SELF/WORLD play out different configurations of these debates. Discursive tensions and interrelations around the notions of subjectivity and individuality are also frequent across the 1870s-1910s corpora. In particular, the notion of case and type, in relation to *Der Fall Wagner* and *Tristan* in particular, play out tensions between singularity and exemplarity. The reconfiguration of the tensions between individuality and collectivity into tensions between interiors and exteriors enables further modes of exploration and expression of different ways in which the self is codified and made real, exploring different modes of subjectivity and notions of agency and meaningful life.

Section IV-2-C centred on the intersections of ART/SELF/WORLD, and the reformulations of the notions and the role of art and the artist in the shifting cultural landscape of the fin de siècle which unfolds around the re-entry of art into life. The self-conscious exploration of art as social practice led to probing the possibilities and limitations of different modes of artistic expression as processes of meaningful elaboration. The conceptualisation of art as cultural practice for the elaboration of meaning emerges in the word frequency analyses with the recurrent semantics of art, understanding, expression and perception. Topic models suggest the different forms of

experimentation with different modes of artistic expression. Similar patterns of distribution in the analyses of word frequencies for the 1870s-1910s corpora also point to the significance of the self-conscious exploration of different modes of expression and understanding and their interrelation with the renegotiations of human and social values and experiences at the time. Recursive strategies also highlight self-conscious processes of experimentation with different modes of expression — the embedding of different genres within the narrative, the foregrounding of the intertextual sources of the narrative and the embedding of selves within selves all serve to self-consciously explore and expose the process of creating meaning and understanding in order to explore the limitations and possibilities of art as cultural practice of meaningful elaboration.

In the final part of the chapter, IV-3, discursive patterns in the research corpora related to decadence are compared with discursive patterns in the research corpora related to modernity, *fin de siècle* and degeneration. In these analyses, significant patterns of self-reference and self-differentiation can be identified between the Decadence corpora and the Modernity, *Fin de Siècle* and Degeneration corpora — decadence both overlaps in significant ways (self-reference) but also keeps open other discursive possibilities (self-differentiation) in relation to each of these corpora. This therefore suggests how decadence can be understood as functioning as the unmarked side of the distinction, or as the open field of discursivity in relation to these corpora. The discursive patterns and tensions that I have elaborated and explored throughout this chapter therefore help to articulate the ways in which different aspects of the *fin de siècle* cultural landscape feed into one another. Higher-level patterns of cumulation and distribution can formalise the tensions and intersections between core discursive domains in the processes of articulation at the time which can help to theoretically and

analytically manage the ways in which decadence is both particularly localised and specific as well as spread across broad discussions and domains, how decadence interrelates a number of disparate discursive domains in particular localised discursive configurations. The analyses in this chapter therefore also serve to contextualise the analyses developed in Chapter III both in relation to the fin de siècle cultural context and in relation to previous research on decadence. Furthermore, this chapter further contributes to substantiating how systemic and discursive approaches to decadence can offer new ways of articulating the ambiguity and liminality of decadence across different cultural domains in the turbulent social and cultural context of the fin de siècle. Because of definitional difficulties posed by decadence critics have often focussed on extreme specificities, on the differences and particularities of decadence. If something is difficult to identify, it is probably wise to focus on what is particular and specific to it. However, this leads to a specific, localised and narrow approach to decadence, and overlooks the overlaps of meaning, the aspects of decadence that seem too widespread, too broad, to be in any way helpful in exploring the meaningfulness of the concept. This has been precisely the drive underpinning this project: understanding how decadence can be so broadly significant, understanding the areas of overlap, the spaces that seem too obvious and widespread to be meaningful. This approach therefore helps to conceptualise the semantic force of decadence as consisting in providing strategies and resources for the destabilisation and exploration of different discursive configurations. Decadence can be productively conceptualised as opening up discursive resources and strategies that play out processes of articulation and re-entry, dynamics of change, across fundamental domains of modern self-understanding and self-experience in the shifting cultural landscape of the fin de siècle. In this way, decadence exposes and explores the dynamics and possibilities of

the process of (re)signification and elaboration of meaning, and the approaches and analyses developed through this chapter, and throughout this thesis more broadly, can open up alternative perspectives on and ways of analysing the particular ambivalences and contradictions of the *fin de siècle* as troubled and troubling time.

## Conclusion

As discussed in the Introduction (and developed further later on in Chapter IV), the fin de siècle is a time of acute instability, uncertainty and ambivalence.

Foundational aspects of social and subjective self-experience and self-understanding undergo profound transfiguration at this time as core cultural institutions, conventions and values become destabilised and opened up for reformulation. In particular, a sense of hopeful optimism and faith in the potentialities of humanity and human ingenuity jars with a concurrent horror at the ruthlessness, hardship and unrest through which these possibilities are unfolded and with an anxiety of the uncertainties of a self-conscious and open future. These profound contradictions and ambivalences are particularly compounded in relation to the concept of decadence especially in the German and Swedish cultural contexts. Decadence emerges as a notably widespread and significant concept at the fin de siècle. It is recurrently linked to the ambivalences of the fin de siècle as time of crisis, and usually understood as a term of provocation and protest to the strand of optimism and positivism by emphasising pessimism, disillusionment and decline. Meanwhile, the characterisation of the German and Swedish cultural contexts at the fin de siècle often emphasises a prevalent sense of renewed optimism and faith in the future which leads to the configuration of decadence within these as an incongruity, or one particular cultural strand that jars with the more general cultural tendencies of the time. Decadence therefore emerges as a particularly revealing concept, especially in relation to the German and Swedish cultural contexts, to explore the ambivalences and contradictions of the fin de siècle as troubled and troubling time. Yet despite the acknowledgement of its particular significant and

widespread use, decadence remains a problematic term in research on the fin de siècle, particularly in relation to literature. Decadence is understood as especially linked to the literary and artistic domains, and yet it also far exceeds these as a particularly widespread concept intervening across a variety of different cultural spheres. Its striking prevalence becomes an analytical hindrance — it is diffuse and widespread to such an extent that it becomes empty of meaning. In this understanding, the prevalence and diffuseness of the term reduces its meaning and significance. Decadence therefore emerges as a particularly unstable, vague and ambiguous concept which renders it a highly unstable and questionable term for (literary) analysis. It is at this analytical juncture that this project is situated — how to reconcile the notable saliency and significance of decadence with its profound ambiguity and instability, how to analytically conceptualise and explore the ambivalences and the contradictions of decadence at the fin de siècle.

In Chapter I, I explored how scholars have conceptualised and addressed the fundamental ambiguity and liminality of decadence at the fin de siècle. Scholars recurrently flag up issues of meaning by foregrounding the vagueness and instability of the term. As noted above, one aspect of the ambiguity of decadence is its particular diffuseness (I-1). The concept is not only notably widespread at the fin de siècle, it is also used in a striking array of different ways at this time. The particular prevalence of the term does not solidify its definition but rather seems to multiple the ways in which it can be meaningful. This has led scholars to argue that the acute diffuseness of the term renders it rather empty of meaning, that it is more suggestive rather than substantive and therefore demands a radically contextualised approach. Another approach to the particular suggestiveness and diffuseness of decadence has been to elaborate lists of recurring features of literary decadence — in this way, decadence can

be apprehended as shifting constellations and arrangements of these cumulative patterns of features. Others have argued against such substantive approaches, and rather emphasised that the particular diffuseness of decadence demands strategic and functional approaches rather than a substantive approach.

A further aspect of decadent ambiguity is linked to the conceptualisation of the semantic shift it undergoes at the fin de siècle (I-2). The ambiguity of decadence at the fin de siècle is understood here as emerging from fundamental tensions between the reinterpretation of the term in literary and artistic spheres as a term of protest and provocation, and the conventional meaning of the term as a concept of cultural critique. These fundamental tensions that structure decadence are further compounded in the way in which the concept is profoundly imbricated in the turbulent reformulations and shifts unfolding in the broader cultural and social context of the fin de siècle. In this way, decadence holds together fundamental tensions, and straddles and interrelates an array of different cultural domains. In order to analytically manage these conflicting and complex dynamics of the term, scholars often dichotomise and fragment the concept into separate and usually opposing aspects — decadence therefore becomes structured around sets of dichotomies and tensions (for example, as noted above, term of protest on the one hand, and term of cultural critique on the other).

Approaches to decadence through theories of change, however, do not dichotomise or separate these constitutive tensions but rather hold them together in conceptualising decadence in terms of liminality (I-3). The liminality of decadence is part of its ambiguity as a particularly unstable concept. However, configuring decadence in terms of liminality reframes it as a dynamics and process for effecting change. Structural tensions and lack of substance become productively reinterpreted as facilitating processes of change. However, this reformulation is usually rooted in



approaches to decadence in terms of theories of history and time. Furthermore, the emphasis on liminality does not necessarily productively reinterpret the fundamental ambiguity of decadence as significant or meaningful in itself, but rather strictly in its function as facilitator of change. In the final part of Chapter I (I-4), I therefore turn to approaches to decadence that conceptualise the fundamental ambiguity and liminality of decadence as precisely what constitutes its meaningfulness and significance at the fin de siècle. These approaches conceptualise decadent ambiguity and liminality in terms of dynamics of meaning and (re)signification. These can be productively combined with systemic approaches that facilitate the formalisation and articulation of shifting and interrelating aspects of complex phenomena (thereby addressing issues of structural tensions and interrelations across different cultural domains and scales). Furthermore, these functional approaches can also be combined with cumulative approaches. Similarly to the approach discussed in I-1 for compiling recurring features of literary decadence, cumulative approaches can explore meaningful patterns across a number of instances which opens up new perspectives beyond those of a radically contextualised approach.

These critical insights discussed in Chapter I are combined and reworked in Chapter II in order to elaborate a flexible and productive theoretical and methodological approach to decadent ambiguity and liminality. In the first part of Chapter II (II-1), I explored how the ambiguity and liminality of decadence can be addressed through systems theories. Systems theories formalise the shifting interactions and interrelations of complex phenomena, and conceptualise these as coherent and stabilised yet perennially mutable and shifting dynamics (*emergence* and *autopoiesis*). These theories can therefore productively address the structural tensions of decadence and the way in which it interrelates different culture spheres and levels. Luhmann's systems

theory is particularly useful for reconceptualising the fundamental tensions constitutive of decadent ambiguity as processes of self-reference and self-differentiation that fuel the process of (re)signification (*re-entry*).

The discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe, discussed in the second part of Chapter II (II-2), is especially useful for theorising moments of acute cultural instability as moments of particularly visible and intense processes of (re)signification (*articulation* and *field of discursivity*). Discourse theory (as a systemic theory itself) therefore further theorises the interrelation between different cultural domains, and does so specifically in terms of theories of (re)signification. Furthermore, as a constructionist theory, discourse theory offers theoretical resources for reconceptualising the relations between different cultural practices through meaning and signification — in constructionist theories, cultural reality is theorised as emerging from processes of meaning and signification. This therefore allows for a more flexible exploration through meaning and (re)signification of the relations between literary aspects of decadence with aspects of decadence linked to broader spheres of cultural and social reformulation. Finally, discourse theories conceptualise meaning as emerging from processes of cumulation and interrelation — meaning is conceptualised as regularities in dispersion. Meaning as shared cultural and social reality is substantiated through shifting patterns of cumulation and interrelation. A discursive theorisation of meaning entails conceiving meaning as cultural practice in which meaning is a shared cultural reality elaborated through patterns of cumulation that draw on repositories of potential cultural resources (*field of discursivity*) and that are perpetually destabilised and restabilised into different arrangements and configurations. This therefore allows me to productively address the issue of diffuseness and suggestiveness of decadent ambiguity — rather than a radically contextualised approach, cumulative approaches to

meaning allow to preserve the integrity of the singular contextualised instance whilst also reframing them in terms of their arrangement and amalgamation into higher level of meaningful patterns.

In the third part of Chapter II (II-3), I discussed how computational approaches to textual analysis can methodologically perform the theoretical premises of systems and discourse theories of meaning as processes of self-reference and self-differentiation and of cumulation and interrelation. Word frequency queries re-present patterns of cumulation by fragmenting the corpora into the most recurrent words. These can be productively combined with topic modelling which visualises patterns of words that frequently occur close to one another thereby re-presenting patterns of interrelation. These computational deformances of texts therefore allow to re-visualise and re-present patterns of statistical cumulation and interrelation within and across texts that would not be representable and perceptible otherwise. Furthermore, the malleability of computational methods can allow for the tracing of different lines of inquiry at different scales of analysis thereby facilitating the movement between different scales of analysis and lines of inquiry. This approach therefore productively reframes decadence in terms of dynamics of (re)signification and processes of elaboration of meaning. The significance and meaningfulness of the ambiguity and liminality of decadence can be understood in the way in which it plays out processes of (re)signification and elaboration of meaning. Chapters III and IV then substantiate and exemplify how this approach to decadence can be unfolded into particular analyses.

In Chapter III, I investigated corpora of texts by Mann, Nietzsche, Söderberg and Strindberg written between the 1870s and the 1920s. In the first part of the chapter (III-1), computational deformances of the texts (elaborated using word frequency lists and topic models) re-present patterns of cumulation and interrelation across the

corpora. From these I identified recurring tensions that suggest productive avenues of further investigation — namely, tensions between semantics of individuality and collectivity, physicality and inwardness or subjectivity, and exteriors and interiors. These computational deformances therefore stimulate alternative analytical perspectives on representative texts of decadence at the fin de siècle. In the second part of the chapter (III-2), I explored further how these tensions are unfolded into different possibilities of configurations in more in-depth and fine-grain analyses of *Der Fall Wagner* by Nietzsche, *Tristan*, *Tonio Kröger* and *Der Tod in Venedig* by Mann, *Doktor Glas* by Söderberg, and *I havsbandet* by Strindberg. This enabled me to reframe analyses of these texts associated with decadence in terms of processes of self-reference and self-differentiation, repetition and variation, cumulation and interrelation both on intra- and inter-textual perspectives as enabled by the theoretical resources discussed in Chapter II and as further informed by the computational deformances in III-1.

In section III-2-A, I explored how Nietzsche's configuration of Wagner as case and his reformulation of French sources to elaborate and stimulate his own critical process of understanding can be reframed in terms of processes of self-reference and self-differentiation at the intersection of collectivity and individuality. Similarly, in *Tristan*, *Tonio Kröger* and *Der Tod in Venedig*, protagonists viewed as types explore through processes of re-entry different configurations of social and personal issues in the shifting landscape of the fin de siècle. Furthermore, these processes of re-entry can be seen as playing out not only on intra- but also on inter-textual levels. This therefore suggests how dynamics of repetition and variation, self-reference and self-differentiation, also foreground and explore different compositional and structural

possibilities of meaningful elaboration at the intersections of individuality and collectivity.

In section III-2-B, I discussed the exploration of and experimentation with different modes of meaningful expression in the interplay between expressive and realistic aesthetics at the intersections between individuality and collectivity and physicality and inwardness. In *Der Tod in Venedig* echoing figures concretise and exteriorise processes of self-reference and self-differentiation in Aschenbach's journey of self-exploration. Furthermore, in both *Der Tod in Venedig* and *Doktor Glas*, realist descriptions of space, landscapes and weather become spatialisations of the protagonists' minds — in this way, spaces and places serve as concretisation and exteriorisation of interior psychological states and processes. Yet on the other hand, the sense and experience of self and subjectivity is substantiated and made real through self-conscious echoes of intertextual resources and references. The sense of self is only experienced and made meaningful through self-conscious cumulation and interrelation of exterior cultural and intertextual references. The intersecting tensions between interiority and exteriority, physicality and inwardness, collectivity and individuality, therefore expose and explore different possibilities of meaningful configuration of the self and social life in self-conscious processes of repetition and variation.

This is explored further in section III-2-C in which I analysed how recursive strategies in *Tristan*, *Doktor Glas* and *I havsbandet* self-consciously expose and explore the very meaningfulness of notions of the self, subjectivity and of art and meaningful artistic creations as processes of construction and (re)signification. These self-referential strategies — embedding and ironising different styles and genres within the text, the self-conscious foregrounding of intertextual processes by embedding

stories within stories and selves within selves — make visible the processes of meaningful and creative elaboration as contingent processes of construction. This textual self-consciousness exposes and explores the limits and desirability of the knowability of the self as well as the possibilities and limitations of different modes of artistic expression as processes of meaningful elaboration. The analyses throughout this chapter therefore explore how decadence can be understood as exposing and exploring the very processes of meaningful elaboration by opening up discursive and semantic resources and strategies that facilitate and foreground processes of re-entry and articulation.

Chapter IV reconnects to and further expands issues presented in the Introduction. In IV-2 in particular, an analysis of research corpora on decadence explores how decadence is recurrently conceptualised in research literature between 1920s-2010s. The computational deformances of research literature on German, Swedish and Comparative/European Decadence corpora re-present a number of recurrent semantic tensions and interrelations across the corpora which point to how decadence exposes and unfolds processes of reformulation across core areas of modern self-experience and self-understanding. The more in-depth analysis of three particular patterns of semantic tensions — semantics of time around the tension of renewal and decline, optimism and pessimism; tensions between semantics of self, subjectivity and collectivity, social life; and tensions between art and life in the self-conscious reformulation of art as cultural practice for elaborating and exploring different configurations and understandings of a meaningful life — are contextualised in relation to particular areas of destabilisation and reformulation at the fin de siècle — shifts in experiences and conceptualisations of time from which emerges a particular temporal self-consciousness; the acute reformulations of notions and experiences of

self, subjectivity and collectivity and the different potential relations between them; and reformulations of notions and the role of art and artist that self-consciously explore the possibilities and limitations of art as cultural practice for elaborating and exploring meaning. The concept of decadence therefore emerges as a particularly significant and meaningful concept that is embroiled in the acute instability through which core areas of social and subjective experience and understanding are reformulated and explored at the fin de siècle. However, it does not emerge as strictly tied to a sense of disillusionment and decline — rather decadence can be understood as providing discursive resources for stimulating and playing out these processes of reformulation, for facilitating the exploration and mediation of different configurations of these particular areas of tension and reformulation. The analyses in IV-3 further extend how decadence can be understood as playing an important role in discursive processes of articulation at the fin de siècle, particularly as a significant discursive resource and semantic strategy which stimulate processes of articulation and re-entry. In this part of the chapter, a comparison of the discursive patterns in the Decadence corpora with discursive patterns of the Modernity, Fin de Siècle and Degenerations corpora (re-presented through computational deformances using word frequency queries) reveals striking patterns of self-differentiation and self-reference between the Decadence corpora and the other corpora. This further suggests how decadence can be understood as strategy and resource facilitating processes of (re)signification. These patterns of self-reference and self-differentiation point to decadence as the unmarked side of the distinction in the process of re-entry, or as the open field of discursivity in the process of articulation in relation to patterns in the Modernity, Fin de Siècle and Degeneration corpora. Chapter IV therefore echoes and complements Chapter III by exploring connections between the discursive patterns explored in

Chapter III with those discussed in Chapter IV, and it also brings the analysis full circle by connecting back to and expanding further the premise of the thesis as laid out in the Introduction — namely, that the theoretical and methodological reframing of decadence as opening up resources and strategies for playing out and exploring processes of (re)signification can address and harness the fundamental ambiguity and liminality of decadence in ways that productively explore the particular ambivalences of the *fin de siècle* as troubled and troubling time.

Throughout this thesis, therefore, an innovative theoretical and methodological approach for exploring interconnections between language, literature and culture at the *fin de siècle* in Germany and Sweden is developed by focussing on the particular liminality and ambiguity of decadence as an especially significant and meaningful concept at this time. Reframing decadence in terms of theories of meaning and (re)signification through the combination of systems theory, discourse theory and computational approaches to textual analysis enables me to conceptualise decadence as opening discursive strategies and resources that stimulate and play out processes of articulation and re-entry. This facilitates a systemic, flexible and productive approach to decadent ambiguity and liminality at the *fin de siècle* in which discursive patterns and processes can be explored across different scales and lines of analysis. The approach developed throughout this project can therefore reframe and rearticulate particular mainstays of research on decadence in more productive and flexible ways thereby suggesting and opening up new perspectives and angles of inquiry. Recurrent patterns of self-reference and self-differentiation, repetition and variation, cumulation and interrelation as explored throughout the analyses in Chapters III and IV exemplify how decadence can be understood to intervene across core areas of modern self-experience and self-understanding in order to facilitate the formulation and



exploration of different possibilities of meaningful configuration of these areas.

Decadence can therefore ultimately be understood as exposing and exploring the very process of (re)signification, of meaningful elaboration, as contingent process of configuration.

The main contribution of this thesis, as emphasised above, is the development of an innovative theoretical and methodological approach for cultural and textual analyses. This approach could be a transferrable approach, but in the context of this thesis it was specifically elaborated to address the recurrent theoretical and methodological dilemmas revolving around decadence at the fin de siècle in Germany and Sweden. The issues of analysing the fin de siècle more generally and decadence more specifically revolve around problems of complexity, ambivalence, instability and ambiguity. In this thesis it is argued that these issues are largely issues of theory and methodology, and therefore can be addressed through a theoretical and methodological reframing. I translate critical issues and insights on decadent ambiguity and instability at the fin de siècle into theories of (re)signification and meaning which enables a reframing and rearticulation of particular mainstays of research on decadence by productively translating issues of ambiguity and liminality into theoretical and methodological springboards. In this reframing the particular characteristics of ambiguity and liminality are precisely the means through which processes of (re)signification and meaningful elaboration can be understood to develop and unfold. Decadent ambiguity and liminality can therefore be productively reframed as playing processes of (re)signification and meaningful elaboration. A systemic, discursive and computational approach to (re)signification allows me to flexibly approach the meaningful and significant ambiguity and liminality of decadence across systemic and local levels and along different lines of inquiry. The combination of these approaches,

in which meaning is conceptualised as cultural practice, collapses methodological and analytical distinctions between language, and cultural and social reality. This facilitates the movement between different aspects and levels of analysis, particularly useful for rearticulating relations between broad cultural debates and renegotiations, and particular instances and literary realisations of decadence. The purpose of this project is therefore not about empirically confirming or disputing the validity of previous findings and analyses of decadence, but rather about reformulating the premises of analysis, opening up the ways in which these analyses can be conceived. This approach aims to provide theoretical and methodological resources for holding together contradictory aspects and flexibly exploring the different array and possibilities of meaningful configuration stimulated and played out through decadence — rather than collapse analyses in terms of either renewal or decline, either isolated individuality or social engagement with collectivity, either cerebral refinement or physical materiality, the plurality of different configurations that can emerge around particular discursive and semantic tensions and interrelations can instead be explored. For example, the issue of subjectivity is a stronghold of research on decadence in particular through analyses of the figure of the decadent. These analyses emphasise the cerebrality and aloofness connected to and constitutive of these figures. In the approach elaborated in this thesis, however, exploring the notion of subjectivity, a key area of reformulation at the *fin de siècle*, involves tensions and interrelations between notions of subjectivity as well as collectivity. The re-entry between collectivity and individuality can be explored in the tensions between interiorities and exteriorities which bring to the fore the exploration and reformulation of notions of collectivity and subjectivity that are unfolded not only through interior and cerebral processes, but also in the interplay with physicality and exterior spaces and places (as explored in particular in III-2-B and IV-2-B). Considering

decadence as resource and strategy for (re)signification can enable us to go beyond classic dichotomisations that underpin approaches to decadence, and see these less as strict opposition and more as discursive resources involved in processes of articulation and re-entry.

The main purpose of this thesis has therefore been to develop an original approach that addresses and harnesses the recurrent issue in research on decadence of the fundamental ambiguity and liminality of the concept in a theoretically and methodologically innovative way in order to open up new analytical perspectives. This approach builds on and reworks critical insights from previous research on decadence to develop new theoretical perspectives and methodological possibilities. The reframing of decadence in terms of theories of meaning and (re)signification stimulates re-engagement, new ways of conceptualising and visualising decadence at the fin de siècle. This can therefore be understood as a contribution to the current aims in certain parts of the field of research on decadence “to enhance and broaden the scope of Decadence studies and stimulate discussion in relation to literary Decadence and other forms of discourse, including Philosophy, Psychology, Religion, and Science.”<sup>1</sup> Even though the theoretical and methodological approach developed in this thesis is grounded in and addresses the particularities of issues related to decadence at the fin de siècle, the general process of theoretical elaboration and the combination of theoretical and methodological strands can be applicable beyond decadence in the nineteenth century context. This thesis therefore also contributes insights into the practical methodological process involved in working with computational approaches to cultural and textual analysis in order to provide inspiration for other researchers who

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<sup>1</sup> *Volupté* website accessed 17 October 2017 <<https://volupte.gold.ac.uk/home/>>

might be interested in working with similar theoretical and methodological approaches. Engaging with decadence as a troubling concept in troubled times in a theoretically and methodologically innovative way contributes more generally towards alternative research approaches on how to explore interconnection between language, literature and culture.



# Index of Appendixes

## **Appendix 1:**

Relates to analyses **Chapter III**.

Description: Full bibliography of sources that are included in the corpus of literary texts related to decadence spanning the 1870s and the 1910s. This corpus is used in the analyses in Chapter III.

## **Appendix 2:**

Relates to analyses in **Chapter IV**.

Description: Full bibliography of sources that are included in the corpus of research literature spanning the 1920s and the 2010s — this is the list of all sources used throughout the whole project in developed the specific analyses discussed in the thesis. For the specific corpora directly discussed in analyses in Chapter IV please consult appendixes 11-30 (as listed below). The first few pages of Appendix 2 also provide a statistical overview of the corpus (such as total number of sources; number of sources according to theme, cultural context under investigation, language of publication, date of publication, genre, etc.)

## **Appendix 3:**

Relates to analyses in **Chapter III**.

Description: An overview of how I filtered frequent words across the corpora as they appeared in the raw word frequency lists into semantically related groupings (the corpora relevant here include all sources in German, all sources in Swedish, all sources by Mann, all sources by Nietzsche, all sources by Söderberg, all sources by Strindberg — although in the analyses in Chapter III-1 I only discuss corpora divided by author). These semantic groupings and their interrelation support the discussion of recurrent discursive patterns in the 1870s-1910s corpora in Chapter III-1. This

appendix therefore provides insight into the analytical process of working with computational methods in elaborating textual analyses.

#### **Appendix 4:**

Relates to analyses in **Chapter IV**.

##### Description:

An overview of how I grouped together frequent words across all the Decadence corpora into significant thematic strands. This appendix illustrates the intermediate analytical step between raw word frequency lists for these corpora and the more stabilised and abstracted discursive domains I ultimately used to structure my analyses of recurring discursive strands and interactions in research on decadence as discussed in Chapter IV-2. The different permutations of corpora that were used in this filtering of word frequencies are (a) corpora subdivided by language (all sources on Decadence according to what language they are written in) — this enables to develop an overarching view of recurrent word frequencies related to Decadence; and (b) corpora differentiated further by the cultural context to which they refer as well as the language they are written in — the allow us to explore patterns of overlap and variation across cultural contexts. In Chapter IV-2 I only discuss directly corpora on Decadence in the German, Swedish and Comparative/European contexts. The lists of corpora used to generate the groupings as show in Appendix 4 are:

(a) corpora subdivided by language: All sources on Decadence in English, all sources on Decadence in German, all sources on Decadence in French, all sources on Decadence in Swedish/all sources on Swedish Decadence in Swedish (these corpora are both the same).

(b) corpora subdivided by cultural context and by language: German Decadence in English, German Decadence in German, Swedish Decadence in English, Swedish Decadence in Swedish/all sources on Decadence in Swedish, Comparative/European Decadence in English, Comparative/European Decadence in German, Comparative/European Decadence in French, French Decadence in English, French Decadence in French, French Decadence in German, British Decadence in English.

**Appendixes 5-10:**

Relates to analyses in **Chapter III**.

Description: These appendixes provide the original word frequency lists used in the development of analyses of the 1870s-1910s corpora in Chapter III. (Refer to the Introduction (section 2) for a reminder on stemmed and exact word frequency lists).

**Appendix 5**: contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus of all texts by Mann for “exact” word frequencies.

**Appendix 6**: contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus of all texts by Mann for “stemmed” word frequencies.

**Appendix 7**: contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus of all texts by Nietzsche for “exact” word frequencies.

**Appendix 8**: contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus of all texts by Nietzsche for “stemmed” word frequencies.

**Appendix 9**: contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus of all texts by Söderberg.

**Appendix 10**: contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus of all texts by Strindberg.

**Appendixes 11-30:**

Relates to **Chapter IV**.

Description: These appendixes list the specific sources that are included in each of the corpora that are directly used in the analyses in Chapter IV.

**Decadence corpora:**

**Appendix 11**: lists all the sources included in the corpus on German Decadence in English

**Appendix 12**: lists all the sources included in the corpus on German Decadence in German

**Appendix 13**: lists all the sources included in the corpus on Swedish Decadence in English

**Appendix 14**: lists all the sources included in the corpus on Swedish Decadence in Swedish



**Appendix 15:** lists all the sources included in the corpus on Comparative/European Decadence in English

**Appendix 16:** lists all the sources included in the corpus on Comparative/European Decadence in German

**Modernity corpora:**

**Appendix 17:** lists all the sources included in the corpus on German Modernity in English

**Appendix 18:** lists all the sources included in the corpus on German Modernity in German

**Appendix 19:** lists all the sources included in the corpus on Swedish Modernity in English

**Appendix 20:** lists all the sources included in the corpus on Swedish Modernity in Swedish

**Fin de Siècle corpora:**

**Appendix 21:** lists all the sources included in the corpus on Comparative/European Fin de Siècle in English

**Appendix 22:** lists all the sources included in the corpus on German Fin de Siècle in English

**Appendix 23:** lists all the sources included in the corpus on German Fin de Siècle in German

**Appendix 24:** lists all the sources included in the corpus on Swedish Fin de Siècle in English

**Appendix 25:** lists all the sources included in the corpus on Swedish Fin de Siècle in French

**Appendix 26:** lists all the sources included in the corpus on Swedish Fin de Siècle in Swedish

**Degeneration corpora:**

**Appendix 27:** lists all the sources included in the corpus on Comparative/European Degeneration in English

**Appendix 28:** lists all the sources included in the corpus on Comparative/European Degeneration in German

**Appendix 29:** lists all the sources included in the corpus on German Degeneration in English

**Appendix 30:** lists all the sources included in the corpus on German Degeneration in German.

### **Appendixes 31-67:**

Relates to analyses in **Chapter IV**.

Description: These appendixes provide the original word frequency lists used in the development of analyses of the 1920s-2010s corpora in Chapter IV. (Refer to the Introduction (section 2) for a reminder on stemmed and exact word frequency lists).

### **Decadence corpora:**

**Appendix 31:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on German Decadence in English for “exact” word frequencies

**Appendix 32:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on German Decadence in English for “stemmed” word frequencies

**Appendix 33:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on German Decadence in German for “exact” word frequencies

**Appendix 34:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on German Decadence in German for “stemmed” word frequencies

**Appendix 35:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on Swedish Decadence in English for “exact” word frequencies

**Appendix 36:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on Swedish Decadence in English for “stemmed” word frequencies

**Appendix 37:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on Swedish Decadence in Swedish

**Appendix 38:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on Comparative/European Decadence in English for “exact” word frequencies

**Appendix 39:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on Comparative/European Decadence in English for “stemmed” word frequencies

**Appendix 40:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on Comparative/European Decadence in German for “exact” word frequencies

**Appendix 41:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on Comparative/European Decadence in German for “stemmed” word frequencies

### **Modernity corpora:**

**Appendix 42:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on German Modernity in English for “exact” word frequencies

**Appendix 43:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on German Modernity in English for “stemmed” word frequencies

**Appendix 44:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on German Modernity in German for “exact” word frequencies

**Appendix 45:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on German Modernity in German for “stemmed” word frequencies

**Appendix 46:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on Swedish Modernity in English for “exact” word frequencies

**Appendix 47:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on Swedish Modernity in English for “stemmed” word frequencies

**Appendix 48:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on Swedish Modernity in Swedish

**Fin de Siècle corpora:**

**Appendix 49:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on Comparative/European Fin de Siècle in English for “exact” word frequencies

**Appendix 50:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on Comparative/European Fin de Siècle in English for “stemmed” word frequencies

**Appendix 51:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on German Fin de Siècle in English for “exact” word frequencies

**Appendix 52:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on German Fin de Siècle in English for “stemmed” word frequencies

**Appendix 53:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on German Fin de Siècle in German for “exact” word frequencies

**Appendix 54:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on German Fin de Siècle in German for “stemmed” word frequencies

**Appendix 55:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on Swedish Fin de Siècle in English for “exact” word frequencies

**Appendix 56:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on Swedish Fin de Siècle in English for “stemmed” word frequencies

**Appendix 57:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on Swedish Fin de Siècle in French for “exact” word frequencies

**Appendix 58:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on Swedish Fin de Siècle in French for “stemmed” word frequencies

**Appendix 59:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on Swedish Fin de Siècle in Swedish

**Degeneration corpora:**

**Appendix 60:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on Comparative/European Degeneration in English for “exact” word frequencies

**Appendix 61:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on Comparative/European Degeneration in English for “stemmed” word frequencies

**Appendix 62:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on Comparative/European Degeneration in German for “exact” word frequencies

**Appendix 63:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on Comparative/European Degeneration in German for “stemmed” word frequencies

**Appendix 64:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on German Degeneration in English for “exact” word frequencies

**Appendix 65:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on German Degeneration in English for “stemmed” word frequencies

**Appendix 66:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on German Degeneration in German for “exact” word frequencies

**Appendix 67:** contains the raw word frequency list for the corpus on German Degeneration in German for “stemmed” word frequencies.



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